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GRACE BUXTON;

OR,

THE LIGHT OF HOME.



“Grace could not resist stopping in the kitchen to find Cl
and tell her the news.”

W BUXTON.



"Grace could not resist stopping in the kitchen to find Charity,
and tell her the news."

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OR,

THE LIGHT OF HOME.

BY

EMMA MARSHALL,

AUTHOR OF "THE OLD GATEWAY," "THE DAWN OF LIFE,"
"BROOK SILVERTONE," ETC.



"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

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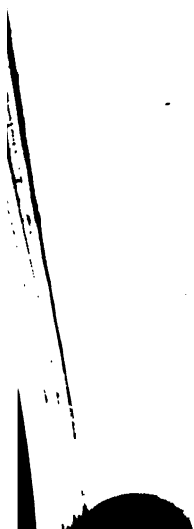
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GRACE BUXTON:

OR,

THE LIGHT OF HOME.

CHAPTER I.

MOOR END COTTAGE.

THE good people of Lewinsea were rather proud of their town, with its mud-coloured river, its close streets, its tall factory chimneys, and its flourishing shops. They always felt offended if any one ventured to speak slightly of the place, to suggest that the situation was low, the air relaxing, the river dirty, and the streets inconveniently narrow.

Many comfortable fortunes had been made in Lewinsea. Many thriving trades were still fol-

lowed there. The little brigs and schooners which came up the Lewin from the sea, some twenty miles below, took away with them stores of various kinds, and rather increased in numbers from year to year.

No doubt, Lewinsea was a place of trade, and the inhabitants were tradespeople, sprinkled with the needful number of professional men,—ten or twelve attorneys, eight doctors, two clergymen, and so on. I do not mean this was the precise number of the representatives of these professions; but I mean this was about the proportion they held to one another. The clergymen were the smallest in number—of that I am very sure,—and the livings of the two churches of All Saints in the west and Saint Thomas in the east of the town, were at the time of which I speak, held by earnest, painstaking, but sometimes overtaxed and over-worked men.

Lewinsea lay very low, and could not be reasonably supposed to be healthy; little by little the wives and families of the inhabitants moved out of the town to a hamlet which skirted the edge of a wide common reached by a continuing gentle ascent from Lewinsea, and was called Lewinsmoor—a name suggestive of a

really was, the moor where the Lewinsea people repaired for fresh air and sea-breezes, when on Sundays and holidays they took a walk over it, with their children. By degrees adventurous builders planned a better class of houses than those of the cottages of the original hamlet, and in a few years most of the principal tradespeople, and nearly all the lawyers, with one or two land-agents, walked or drove up to their country houses after the business of the day was over. Lewinsmoor was the west end of Lewinsea, and no one who could afford to live there failed to take one of the neat villas, with romantic names, or one of the smaller houses, of which there were a few sprinkled here and there, to suit the taste and requirements of all classes.

The district grew year by year, a church was built, and a small endowment granted; too small for the needs of the present incumbent, who found the difficulties of providing even from day to day for his eight children and their delicate, fragile mother, more than he knew well how to meet. How it happened that he did meet this difficulty so cheerily and bravely was a mystery to many. But the Buxtons, at Moor End Cottage, were certainly not the least happy of the

families clustering round the wide down, and excited wonder in some, admiration in others, and respect in nearly all.

Moor End Cottage was at some distance from the church. No parsonage had as yet been built, and Mr Buxton found the accommodation of the curious old-fashioned house more suited to his large family than that afforded by any of the villas I have mentioned. Its date was much further back than that of the new houses, and was contemporary with that of the original hamlet. It had once been a farm-house, with low wide rooms, a square of garden before it, and the heath stretching away on all sides, the wind rushing over the expanse of moorland with a wild eerie sound in winter, and coming with the hum of wild bees, the scent of turf, and the cool freshness of the sea, in summer days.

"You will find it rather a bleak residence, Mr Buxton," the churchwarden, who was a rich land-agent, had said to the incumbent of Trinity Church, when the question of where he should live was discussed. "Healthy, but decidedly bleak, and the little people will find it a long way from the town, I am afraid."

"That won't be a disadvantage," Mr Buxton

had replied; "and as Mrs Buxton has been advised to try a bracing air, I think I shall take Moor End Cottage, Mr Pearson, in preference to Lauristina Villa."

"Well," Mr Pearson had rejoined, "I hope, sir, you may not regret it. There is no question which is the most genteel residence, sir—no question; but your little people may like the freedom of the country, and the garden, sir."

The little people did decidedly like the garden, though the question of freedom did not trouble them. It was considered by the Buxtons that a change from the heart of a neighbouring town, where their father's cure had previously been, to Moor End Cottage was the summit of felicity. From grave and thoughtful Ruth, to the little gay, laughing Liliias there was but one opinion,—that to live at Moor End would be delightful indeed; and now after three years' trial they had not changed their minds.

Ruth and Grace, the two eldest girls, of fourteen and fifteen years old, had been to service with their father one cold Wednesday evening in January. It was very cold and very dark, and the lights of Lewinsea behind them, and the lights of Lewinsmoor before them, twinkled

pleasantly in contrast to the black sky, which seemed to brood so closely over them, and the dark sodden ground, over which their feet could not trip so fast as they were wont, for rain had been falling almost incessantly for three weeks past, and this had been the first dry day, though no one could have ventured to call it a fine one.

"Don't the lights look pretty?—prettier than usual to-night," Grace said. "Every one seems to have their hall-doors illuminated. Papa, I do think the Bells have got a party. All the windows up-stairs are lighted up. I think I heard Bobbie say it was one of the Bells' birth-days. Yes, I am certain I did. Papa, listen; I hear them playing and singing, I am sure."

Grace looked rather longingly at Lauristina Villa as she spoke. Children's parties, with the necessary accompaniments of white muslin frocks and wide sashes, flowers and music, were not without their attractions for her. She did wish sometimes that she could be allowed to accept the invitations which occasionally came to Moor End, but which were always declined with every expression of gratitude for the attention; but s

decidedly declined, that they became fewer and fewer as time went on.

"Come, Grace," said Ruth, "keep up to papa, it is so dark, and we shall pass the last gas-lamp directly."

Grace quickened her pace, but her head was still turned back to catch sight of the gleaming lights in Lauristina Villa, and to strain her ear for the sound of music.

Mr Buxton had been walking on with steady, determined steps, his children following. But now he paused, and, bidding tall Ruth take one arm, he gave his hand to Grace on the other side, and so they continued their walk along the well-known road. Here and there also lights twinkled in cottage homes, like tiny stars in the darkness; and as Mr Buxton and his children passed a block of small low-roofed houses, a woman, standing by the little wicket-gate leading up to the first of these, said, "Is that you, sir, please?"

Nothing could be seen but the white apron which had been thrown over the head of the speaker. But Mr Buxton knew the voice:—

"Mrs Mason, is it not?"

"Yes, sir. I knew you would be coming,

home from service, being Wednesday evening, sir; and I am going to ask the favour of your stepping in a minute."

"I will certainly do so. My two daughters are with me; they must come in also. But, Mrs Mason, this is not your house."

"No, sir; but things are going very badly here—very badly indeed. And now I think of it, perhaps the young ladies had better go into my cottage. Mary is there, and father too. I'll just show them in, sir."

As she spoke, Mrs Mason led, or rather felt, the way to the latch of the next gate, and Ruth and Grace, at their father's bidding, followed the guide of the white apron up the narrow path to the door of another house. The sound of coming footsteps brought Mary Mason to the door immediately, and the two girls entered, while Mrs Mason returned to Mr Buxton, who was waiting for her at the gate.

"There has been terrible bad news here this afternoon, sir," Mrs Mason said, as she rejoined Mr Buxton. "Poor Henry Gale has been taken before the magistrate, and is sent to prison to wait for the sessions. He is took up on a charge of robbing the till in his master's shop. His

poor mother is raving like a mad thing, and she and her husband go on reproaching each other till I could break my heart to hear them, while little Charlie is very ill with croup; and there don't seem to be one of them able to do a thing. And, sir," said Mrs Mason, "it's hard work helping those as won't help themselves, and, over and above that, have nothing to do with the Great Helper."

"Yes, Mrs Mason, you are quite right; let us go in."

Mr Buxton knocked at the cottage door and entered as he spoke. His reception was not a very encouraging one, but he was not perceptibly moved by it. It was truly a miserable scene. The poor, half-frantic mother; the sulky, dogged father; the hard, distressing breathing of little Charlie in his cradle; the useless, helpless condition of two girls of ten or eleven years old, who stood staring at Mr Buxton, with their fingers in their mouths, and their long untidy hair hanging over their faces.

Mrs Mason's presence in that room had some effect. She quickly busied herself with Charlie, using simple remedies that were attainable, and setting the two sisters, Fanny and Hester, to

fetch what she wanted. Mrs Mason turned a deaf ear to Mrs Gale's exclamations that she would "kill her child with her nasty mustard poultices, that she didn't want the parson brought in unawares in that manner, that Mrs Mason need not be so pleased that her poor Henry had got into trouble." And then as Charlie's trumpet-like cough sounded again and again, Mrs Gale fell into fresh fits of hysterical crying, and, clinging to the sweet, gentle, tender woman who thus befriended her, entreated her not to leave her.

Meantime Mr Buxton was trying to gather from Gale some account of his boy's delinquencies. He gave the particulars in a sullen, disrespectful manner, and interspersed his talk with so many bad words, that Mr Buxton understood very well why Mrs Mason had said his own two young daughters had better not enter the Gales' cottage. Several times Mr Buxton authoritatively bid the father remember what Holy Name he was taking in vain; and as the tumult was hushed a little, and the sick child fell into an uneasy doze in Mrs Mason's lap, the clergyman raised his voice, and said a few simple words which all could hear—words of warning and

comfort too ; for his heart ached as he thought of the misery of this godless family. Finally he promised that he would see Mr Hastings soon, and learn on what grounds the charge against Henry was made ; and also write to a friend at Saltstone, the large county town where the sessions were held, and ask him to go and visit the unhappy boy in prison.

Mrs Mason looked up as Mr Buxton was leaving the house.

"I shall stay here all night, sir," she said. "Would you kindly tell my husband so ? and Mrs Gale will, I hope, go and get some rest. She is scarce out of her late illness, poor thing ! I am not wanted at home ; and they will be glad I should be of use. Susan, child, run and open the door for the gentleman."

Gale himself did not stir, but sat, as he had done all along, crouching over the fire, with his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands. Susan dragged her slipshod feet across the floor, and reached the door just as Mr Buxton closed it and went out into the dark night. In a few moments more Ruth and Grace had rejoined him, and they were walking quickly homewards.

The girls had heard Mrs Mason's message to

her husband and daughter delivered, and Grace said :—

“ It is very kind of Mrs Mason, papa, to stay with those dirty people ; they are such bad, disagreeable neighbours. Don’t you remember how rude the man was once when we asked if the girls could not come to school ? ”

“ Yes, Grace, they are, as you say, very disagreeable neighbours for the Masons, and very unpromising parishioners for me. But perhaps they have been brought to that cottage for their good. As I was walking on before you to-night, I was thinking of the words of our Lord, ‘ Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick ; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.’ The Gales are strangers here, and are brought in God’s mercy to live near one whose light shines like the brightest of the twinkling lamps which you said were so pretty to-night, Grace. Well, we have all to look to it that our own light shines at home and abroad. The darker the atmosphere around, the brighter *the shining*. Your mother will wonder why we

are so late this evening. I hear Bobbie shuffling along the passage to let us in. What a lazy fellow he is! Why don't you sisters wake him up, instead of spoiling him?"

The door was slowly opened as Mr Buxton spoke, and Grace's twin brother, Robert, appeared behind it.

"Robert, look how you are holding the candle!" was Ruth's greeting. "The tallow is running over your coat-sleeve."

"Bobbie, did you not tell me there was to be a party at Lauristina Villa one night this week?" was Grace's question.

But Robert seemed to pay very little heed to either of his sisters' remarks, and resigning the candle to Ruth, returned to the square sitting-room, where the family were all assembled.

A round table in the middle of the room was covered with a mass of needlework, books, and papers; the books and papers were Robert's property, and piled up before the chair in which he re-seated himself, dragging it towards him with his leg, and shaking back a lock of bright curly hair, which was always hanging over his eyes, as he did so. His hands were white and small, his complexion delicate and girlish, his large blue

eyes were dreamy, and looked out beneath eyebrows finely pencilled on a white forehead. This was the only boy in the Buxton family, who, contrary to the usual custom of boys, seemed to leave all the life and brightness and robust activity to his seven sisters. Even Grace, his twin sister, though quite as delicate-looking, and remarkable for her refined beauty, had three times the spirit and energy of Robert; and who shall put any limit on the exuberance of animal life and spirit which was divided between the other children?—Jennie with her merry black eyes, Susan, Mabel, Tiny, and the Baby—that little mischievous sprite who was still called Baby *par excellence*, but who had just passed her fifth birthday, and had no positive claim to the title now. Who shall tell of all the torn frocks which the careful elder sister mended for the little ones, the scrapes innumerable in which Susan and Mabel especially were always in, about lost books, lost gloves, untidy hair, rumpled collars? This family, like many others, seemed divided into the two great classes of tidy and untidy, careful and careless. Ruth headed the *first of these*, and Jenny, Grace, and Tiny were *with her*; while Susan, Mabel, Baby, and Bobbie

never knew where anything was, never were in time for work or play, but were heedless and careless, and made work for other people, whilst they effected little themselves.

I daresay some little girls, and big girls too, who read this story, will, if they are honest to themselves, plead guilty to similar heedlessness as we call it. Is not selfishness a better name? If a little thought, a little care and precision, in personal arrangements, saves another trouble and annoyance, surely it is our duty to try and *think* for the comfort of those around us. There is, indeed, no choice left to us, if we really desire to please Him who pleased not Himself.

The picture of the Buxton family would not be complete without the mother's portrait. But I find it difficult to describe her, so entirely laid aside as she was, and yet so useful,—a prisoner to her sofa day after day, year after year, and yet superintending everything, watching all her children, and exerting untold influence over them,—seeing, as in a glass, the faults of each, praying for them individually and collectively. Patient, bright, and loving, Mamma's sofa was the nucleus of all the sunshine of the household. *Here the little ones spelt over their first lessons;*

here the needle was guided through the tear-stained seams and crooked hems ; here the mysteries of taking two from six and adding nine to five were learned ; and here, Bobbie—lazy, sweet-tempered, but provoking Bobbie—brought all his school-troubles, and all the rugged places in his Latin and Algebra, which were mountains of difficulty to him in his father's study, and became smoother and easier as he was helped over them by his mother's patient hand. It was always customary to put the adjective "poor" before Mrs Buxton's name. But few people were less to be pitied. The disease in her hip-joints, which had now been stationary for years, was not often very painful, though she had times of weariness and discomfort, which were guessed at by those around her rather than known. Mrs Buxton was happy—happy in that only true sense—happy because she held the treasure within of which no earthly hand could deprive her—the "peace which passeth understanding" ; and happy because she looked forward and onward and upward to an inheritance incorruptible "the rest which remaineth to the people God."

This evening the bright smile with which "

girls were welcomed brought to Ruth's mind her father's words about the shining of light in the daily path of home. Having taken off her things at once, she now went up to her mother's sofa, saying—

“Charity has put Baby to bed, I find. We are so late because papa was called into the Masons' cottage;” and then Ruth told the story. “Now the table must be cleared, supper will be here directly. Come, Susie and Bobbie, put away your books, please. Have they been too much for you this evening, dear mother?”

“No, dear, but I began to get rather anxious about you. It is just nine.”

The clock struck, and, punctual to a moment, Charity entered with a tray, which she left to Ruth to arrange on the table, while, with the unceremonious abruptness of an old servant, she told Tiny and Mabel to bid good-night directly; and they departed without a word of remonstrance.

Charity, and a succession of girls from the school who came for training under her eye, formed Mr Buxton's establishment; but Charity, after seventeen years' service, was a host in herself. Rugged she might be, quick of speech,

irritable in temper ; but how faithful, how loving, and how true, her master and mistress well knew ! Charity had her especial favourites in the family, and first and foremost of these were the twins.

“ Come, Miss Grace, my dear,” she said, as she went up-stairs, driving Tiny and Mabel before her, “ what are you doing here in the cold all this time ? I have carried in supper, and knocked at the study door. Make haste down, you look pinched with cold. I have no opinion myself of these evening services—for you leastways.”

“ I am not cold, Charity, only tired. I want a run on the moor with Susie and Jenny, but I don’t believe it will ever be fine again.”

“ Well, ‘ it’s a long lane that has no turning.’ The sun will shine again, sure enough ; though such a pattering and splashing of rain as has gone on since Christmas is disheartening, I own. There is water in the scullery up to my pattens. It’s a mercy you all keep as well as you do. Come, my dears, run up, I can’t be all night wasting my time after you.”

Time Charity certainly seldom wasted, but words now and then did come with an outpour-

ing that, like the rain, seemed never going to stop. But if her tongue was busy, so were her hands and feet, and the full tide of talk was so completely a part of herself, that no one ever thought of complaining. So Charity's orations were often the subject of amusement in the family she so faithfully served.

CHAPTER II.

A LETTER.

THE next morning, after a short struggle with a bank of clouds eastward, and a curtain of mist hanging over Lewinsea and the river, the sun was victorious. The whole landscape was bathed in glowing brightness, which raised every one's spirit, as it touched all outward things with a lustre which had been unknown for three dreary weeks. The Buxtons had just finished their early breakfast that morning, when Tiny ran to meet the postman, who, as he delivered three letters to the child, made the same remark that every one else did—"Fine morning, missie." Tiny responded, and danced back with the letters.

"Guess how many," she said, "and guess who they are for."

"You can't read writing, Tiny ; so how do you know ?" said Mabel.

"I do know, because I was told," said Tiny, honestly. "The postman said there were three letters for mamma," and Tiny laid them on her mother's little table.

"Three for me!" said Mrs Buxton. "What an unusual event in these days! One is from Aunt Grace, too!" she exclaimed, holding up an envelope addressed in a small crooked hand to her husband.

"Really, and quite a budget too," Mr Buxton replied. "Lady Melstone must have suddenly awakened to a remembrance of our existence, poor old lady!"

Then he kissed his wife, and departed on his day's work, calling Bobbie to make haste and follow, as he could walk as far as Trinity School House with him on his way to Lewinsea, where Bobbie attended the Grammar School, the master of which was Mr Vernon, the rector of All Saints.

While Ruth looked after some household matters, the children prepared for their lessons, and Mrs Buxton had time to read her letters. Lady Melstone's was kept to the last, and Grace, who was watching her mother's face as she read it, noticed that the sheet was scanned again and

again, and there was an enclosure in the envelope, where the letter was at last replaced with a sigh and a smile.

Then Charity came, and the question of dinner was settled, and then the children were ready for their Bible lesson, and sat waiting for their mother to begin.

"Grace, you have not got your Bible," said Ruth returning; "and I think you might have found Tiny's and Mabel's place. It is the fifth chapter of St Matthew's Gospel, you know. Grace, what are you thinking of?"

Ruth could not dive into her sister's thoughts, but we are privileged to do so. Grace was wholly absorbed with thinking about old Lady Melstone's letter. For she was her godmother, and she had received her name from her; and some dim ideas were floating in the child's mind that some day she should go and pay her a visit, which had indeed been once darkly hinted, and the very possibility of which made Grace's heart beat with pleasure. Home was dear to her—dearer than she knew; but she pined secretly for things which were above her reach. All the delicate refinements of life were tempting in *Grace's* eyes. She was romantic and imagi-

native ; and Ruth was matter-of-fact and practical.

Bobbie had plenty of romance in his nature too, but it was of a different kind to his sister's. She was quick, ardent, and impulsive, where he was dreamy, quiet, and indolent. Grace cared for the minutiae of personal appearances. Bobbie ignored them, and did not mind what a figure he was, as he wandered over the heath on summer evenings, lay on the turf lazily watching the white clouds float overhead, and the birds flit across through the pure air, or the swallows skim the surface of the little quiet dark pools which were hidden by their fringe of purple heather and rich brown moss. Grace only had Bobbie's sympathising ear into which to pour all her little longings and desires. If she lamented to Ruth over the routine of daily home life, hinted her desire for prettier dresses and more becoming hats, Ruth would tell her it was silly to talk so, and assure her she would not be a bit the happier, if she had as many different hats and frocks as the Miss Bells, or the little Pearsons, or a dozen other girls they knew by sight. Besides, surely Grace did not want to be like them ; *it was far more ladylike to be neatly and plainly dressed.*

"Yes, of course, I know that," Grace would reply. "But I don't pretend to say I do not think I want a new linsey frock. This was yours last winter, and then you grew so fast, it came to me; and look how faded and shabby it is, and how brown my hat is too; it really can't be called black any longer."

And again Ruth would rejoin—

"I can't think how you can make a grievance of such things, Grace."

And Grace would perhaps launch out into a string of other desires which sprang from the shabby linsey and the brown-black hat—desires for more accomplishments, for companions of their own rank and age, for a pretty drawing-room, where everything was bright and smiling and appropriate; how different to their square sitting-room, with its dull painted walls, its well-worn furniture, and threadbare carpet; but oftener she was silent and kept her dreams to herself.

Whether the sound from afar of the Bells' party the evening before, had given the key-note, certain it is, Grace had got up that bright morning in a somewhat discontented mood; and the cloud on her face did not escape the mother's watchful eye.

The lessons were shortened, that the beautiful day might be taken due advantage of by a long walk, and at eleven the children all scampered up-stairs to dress, Ruth and Grace lingering to put away all the books neatly, and to ask their mother if one of them should not stay with her. Mrs Buxton's reply was as usual, "Certainly not;" but she called Grace back as she was leaving the room, and said, "One of my letters concerns you, Grace."

"Me, mamma? is it Lady Melstone's?"

"Yes; Aunt Grace has sent a request for your photograph, and has enclosed a cheque, which we must convert into money at the Lewinsea Bank, to pay for it. The surplus is to be yours, Grace, to do what you like with."

Grace's eyes sparkled and her cheeks flushed,—

"Oh, mamma, when may I get the money? When may I go to Sanders'?—to-day?"

"Oh, no, not to-day; we must consult papa first. I had not time to read him the letter. Now go and get ready, dear."

Grace obeyed, and tripped up-stairs full of delight. The idea of being photographed was *pleasant*. She had often wished to have a *carte*

of herself. Then her mother had not said how much money, but very likely there would be plenty left. Down in the depths, too, of Grace's heart lurked the thought, "Perhaps if old Aunt Grace likes the photograph, she will really send for me to go to Rockton; perhaps ask Bobbie to come too, in the holidays, or Mabel. None of the others would care one bit about it." So Grace thought as she ran after her sisters that bright morning. The clouds were gone from her sky now, and she could not resist stopping in the kitchen to find Charity, and tell her the news.

"Dear me, dear me!" was the reply, as Charity raised her floury fingers to her face, and rubbed her cheek with her wrist, for she was in the midst of bread-making. "Deary me! Well, I am sure I am glad you are pleased, and I don't mind if I have my picture taken too; for times and times has my sister in Australia begged and besought me to send it to her. So, if your mamma has no objection, we will go together. There! yours will be a photograph worth looking at, I make no doubt. But come, run away, run away now, Miss Grace."

Mr Buxton returned before the children, and

we will look over his shoulder as he read the quaint and amusing letter which concerned Grace's future:—

“MY DEAR RUTH,—(What an odd fancy it was of your poor mother to give you such a name!) I have not heard from you for an age. You had just exchanged the heart of Saltstone for Lewinsmoor when you wrote to me. That is two years ago now. I hope you are better, and able to get into the air. There is nothing like a drive every day, and good nourishing food, for chronic invalids. How are the eight children—or nine, which is it? I want to see what my great-niece, namesake, and godchild is like; so let her get her photograph taken, and send it to me.

“My health, like your own, is never very good, and I am sometimes rather dull, as I am obliged to give up society almost entirely.

“Perhaps the child Grace may come and pay me a visit; but let me have a notion what she is like first. You would not miss one out of such a tribe of children; and if she suited me—well, we might find it a mutual advantage.

“Mention me kindly to your husband. By

the bye, when is he going to be raised to some position in the Church befitting his own and his wife's family? Your affectionate aunt,

"GRACE LOUISA ROSE MELSTONE."

Then came a P.S. :—

"I enclose a pound or two to pay for the photograph of the child. Let her have what is over for her own use. G. L. R. M."

"Poor old lady!" was Mr Buxton's somewhat impatient comment, uttered at intervals, as he went through the letter.

"Well, are you going to comply with this ridiculous request?" he continued; "you had better send the money back."

"No, I think not. I don't wish to offend an old lady like poor Aunt Grace. She affects a good deal of this off-hand manner. Hers is a lonely old age, and I am sorry for her."

"Very different to your own middle age, which is passed in a crowd. But it is rather too much, her setting up her fictitious ailments against yours, and advising you to *drive*. Well, the photograph must be taken, I suppose; but the beauty of the family must not go to Rockton,

which I imagine is what her ladyship is pointing at."

"Are you tired to-day?" was his wife's rejoinder; for she saw Mr Buxton's face was troubled and anxious, and he did not often express himself so sharply.

"I have had a trying morning, Ruth," was the answer. "Mr Vernon, to begin with, complains much of Bobbie; he says he loses so much time, and never is half prepared with his lessons; that boys with a third of his abilities pass him, and that nothing seems to make much impression on him."

"Did you meet Mr Vernon, then, to-day?"

"Yes, I went into Lewinsea to see the man who prosecuted Gale's boy. I fear there is no doubt he is guilty,—and scarcely twelve years old! Hastings expressed himself sensibly enough. I hope it will end in his being sent to a reformatory school. But, my dear, if our only boy is to be like this, it is a very disheartening prospect. He will have to go into some office as a clerk, unless he applies himself more heartily to his books. I wish Grace had a better influence with him, but somehow she misses it. Her little head is full of all kinds of dreams, and Bobbie

writes poetical romances to feed them. I stumbled on a page of one in the study the other day : good rhyme, and clever enough : but how useless such a talent is to a boy who has his way to make in the world ! ”

“ I will talk to him very seriously next time we are alone,” the gentle mother said. “ He is a dear affectionate boy, and so loveable.”

And as Mr Buxton left the room, she fell into a train of thought about her children, the drift of which most mothers can understand. Then she went over the seemingly strange perversity which had given Jennie a spirit which was always panting for action and enterprise ; and Susan a power of application to her lessons which was lifting her far ahead of the others ; and perseverance to dear painstaking, conscientious Ruth ; and a fair amount of energy to Grace ; while her twin brother dreamed on his way, and thought most things in which boys delight a bore and a bother and a nuisance. But Mrs Buxton knew that temperaments in families do not happen by chance. She knew that God appointeth the peculiar circumstances and peculiar temptations of each, and she prayed to be directed aright in leading her children to form

an octave in which every note should have its proper sound, and the harmony of the household melody be complete.

Mrs Mason, the kind neighbour who had befriended the Gales in their trouble, did not weary in well-doing. She nursed little Charlie through the croup, which yielded with God's blessing to her remedies ; and the poor mother was touched into gratitude. Mrs Mason tried to put the two girls into more tidy and handy ways ; and, hopeless as the task seemed, there was a shade of improvement in the aspect of things when Mr Buxton next called. He came to tell Mrs Gale that his friend had seen her boy, that he was hopeful about his being really penitent, and that there was no doubt he would be sent to a reformatory school, where much might be expected in the way of improvement, and establishing the boy in the paths of honesty and truth.

Mr Buxton, whatever his home anxieties might be, always threw himself into the concerns of his people, for the time, and it was this real hearty interest in them that gave him such a hold on their affections.

"When we are talking, he is listening—not only *pretending* to listen," Mrs Mason had said

once, when she was advising Mrs Gale to tell him some of her troubles, and ask his help. And indeed her troubles were great, poor woman ! Her husband had never had his home made comfortable to him, and he had turned into public houses for brightness and warmth at first, but soon for drink and low gambling. He earned very good wages as a haulier to the vessels on the quay ; but the Gales always wore the aspect of poverty ; bad management, bad habits, and an entire forgetfulness of their duty towards God, was the reason of this. There was no light shining in the poor Gales' cottage ; it was a darkness there which might be felt. Yet the poor woman herself would not see wherein she differed so greatly from her happy neighbours. The Masons had had their share of affliction and sorrow, of illness and consequent privation, of hard struggling with poverty and want. But through it all they had tried in their humble way to trust God, and serve Him ; and most true it is that His faithful children *do* find a peace which the world gives not, nor takes away.

"Mother," said Mary Mason, as she came in from school, a little sister on each hand, "Mr

Buxton nas just gone in next door. Hester is standing by the gate, and she told me so."

"I am glad to hear it, my dear; maybe he will look in here if he has time; but don't get into the way of gossiping at the gate with the Gales every time you go past. I heard your voices, and should have come to call you in, only I wanted to get these things ironed before dinner, and have not a minute to spare. I lost one day of the week by looking after that poor child next door, and must work a little harder to make it up."

"Mother," Mary said, as she hung up her own and her sisters' hats and little capes on a nail behind the door, "you told me to try and help the Gales, and perhaps I should get them to go to school along with us."

"So I did, dear, so I did; but talking and gossiping is not the way to do that; it is not what we *say* to folks, Mary, it is what we *are*. It is not the first time lately I have seen you leaning against that gate, talking and laughing with the poor girls. Better let them see you brisk to school and brisk back again, dropping a word now and then, and doing anything you *can* for them."

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“ Why, mother, what could *I* do ? ”

“ Well, I was thinking when you are mending your clothes on Saturdays, as you always do, you might step in with your work and ask Hester and Fanny if you shall help them with theirs.”

“ Mother, it is a miserable place to sit, in there,—so dirty and untidy ! ”

Nevertheless, Mary thought of her mother's words, still more of her mother's example ; and both had their effect.

CHAPTER III.

THE PHOTOGRAPH.

THE important day came at last when Grace Buxton found no obstacle in the way of a visit to Mr Sanders' photographic rooms in Quay Street.

There had been some delay, which had tried Grace's patience more than she chose to confess. First a fine day, when Charity could not possibly accompany her; then a cloudy one, when the light would be bad; then a hopelessly wet one, when the expedition was not to be thought of. Then, more trying than all, the first attempt was useless. "Mr Sanders was engaged: the young lady must be so kind as to make an appointment: the days were so short that Mr Sanders had really not time to attend to half his patrons."

Poor Grace silenced Charity—who, arrayed in a large purple and black check mohair dress,

which was very short, very stiff in its folds, and very uncompromising about the sleeves and skirt, began to hint they had better try another place farther down the street, where she knew the pictures were not half the price,—and with a blushing face wrote her name in a formidable big book (which, by the by, was only at its third leaf, and was not likely to fill very rapidly in Lewinsea,) “Miss Grace Buxton — Saturday — at twelve o’clock, January 30.”

“You had better write me down too, Miss Grace,” said Charity, jogging her elbow.

Grace was hesitating, when the trim young lady who attended in the portrait-room, with its rows of photographs in every possible style and *pose*, remarked,—

“If that person is going to give Mr Sanders a sitting, it had better be entered.”

“Of course I am!” said Charity. “Of course I am! and I am ready to pay my full and just price too. But I want a likeness you know, not a fanciful thing; it is to send as far off as Australia—pretty nearly the end of the world, I should say.”

Grace was anxious to cut short Charity’s long speech, and hastily writing “Charity Martin’s”



THE PHOTOGRAPH.

name beneath her own, was glad to say good-morning, and retreat down the narrow dirty stairs.

When the longed-for Saturday really arrived, Grace set out in high spirits with her father, who was called into Lewinsea that morning. Jennie and Susan were chosen to go with their sister, and were quite as much delighted with the expedition as she was. I dare say a great many of my readers have gone through the trials of having their photograph taken. For trials indeed they may well be called; and vanity and desire to look one's best sadly interfere with the end in view; for most certain it is, the worst instead of the best is often the result. Grace felt very nervous and frightened as she ascended the last flight of stairs to Mr Sanders' studio, accompanied only by Charity, her little sisters remaining in the show-room with the smart young lady whom Grace had seen on the day of her first visit to Mr Sanders. Then came the ordeal of being inspected by Mr Sanders, of being put into a forced position opposite the camera, beneath the drapery of which Mr Sanders would bury his head for a moment, and then look up with ruffled hair, entreating the young lady to look natural, to put on a pleasing

expression, and not to contract the lips. Then there were endless arrangements of the dark linsey frock, with some remarks that it was not a material which fell into graceful folds; and at last the moment came, and poor little Grace felt herself staring hopelessly at the smiling face of a girl on a screen, and feeling as if hands, feet, nay, her whole body, were fast locked in an iron grip, like that which some unseen instrument had laid upon her head from behind. It did not mend matters to hear Charity's whispered adjurations "to keep steady" and to "look easy:" while, when the actual process was going on, and Mr Sanders stood with one hand on the lid of the camera and the other on his watch, she gave every now and then a little suppressed cough, which was meant to guard Grace against movement.

Evidently Mr Sanders was doubtful as to the result, for when he signified that the operation was over, he said, "We will try another position now—a sitting one;" and looking at the modest and very pretty face, which was so flushed and almost distressed in its expression, he said, "I think you would do better with your eyes on a book."

Again Grace was seated, and the same ceremony was gone through; though it was a great relief to her aching eyes to fix them on a book, and not to have to stare at the young lady with the smile, which she felt so dreadfully conscious it was hopeless to emulate.

At last it was quite over. Mr Sanders handed the second plate to his black-handed and smoke-dried looking assistant, and then Charity's turn came. Charity in her checked mohair dress, her kindly honest face beaming from under her neat cap, with its green ribbons tied under her chin, after a fashion of maids in days gone by, and her ample collar and large malachite brooch, made no difficulty about her sitting. Grace marvelled at the cool intrepidity with which she sat down in the large chair, or stood with one hand on the back of it, as Mr Sanders was trying the effect of each position. Charity's well-worked hands were rather inconveniently large, and her gown-sleeves fell somewhat short of her large wrists. Mr Sanders suggested that she should hold a basket of artificial flowers which stood on the table.

"No, sir, thank you," was the amusing reply. "I don't wish my sister in Australia to think

I am going clean out of my wits. A bunch of make-believe flowers aren't at all in my line, are they, Miss Gracie, dear ? ”

Grace laughed, and then Charity laughed, and Mr Sanders had to put on his gravest professional air, and enjoin entire stillness and quiet.

Charity had also two positions registered of herself in that mysterious “little odd box with a kind of pall to it,” as she expressed it afterwards, when relating her adventures to Martha on her return home, where they arrived just as the hands of the kitchen clock pointed to two, and the younger children were getting very clamorous for their delayed dinner.

“Well, Grace,” was Ruth's greeting as the two girls met in the bedroom, “I hope you are gratified, and as charmed with your portrait as you expected to be.”

This she said in rather a provoking tone of voice. Ruth had had a busy morning, and Lillias and Mabel had been very tiresome; her German was not prepared for the master from the Grammar School, who came out on Saturday afternoon to increase his small salary by filling up his spare half-hours in giving lesson at a low price, to several families in Lewinsmoo

"I hope you have been gratified, Grace," Ruth repeated; "and now you must sit with mamma, and help her with the children. I have half a page of my exercise to write, and that stupid verse to learn."

"Stupid! O Ruth, it is such a beautiful piece! You mean 'Die Geduld,' don't you?"

"Yes, Patience, of course. It is certainly stuff of which an extra quantity is needed by the eldest sister in a house like ours,—especially when there are some people who can shirk everybody's burdens, not excepting their own, and put these last on to others' shoulders."

Grace coloured rosy red with vexation, but hers was a sweet, serene temper, and she did not answer crossly.

"I'll go down directly to mamma; my German is all ready, except the last verse of the poetry, which I can pick up from Bobbie's book of scraps. I copied it in there for him, and he is putting it into English verse. It is so beautiful, Ruth; I wonder you don't like it."

"I hate poetry," said Ruth; "and I can tell you that mamma says all the romantic nonsense you encourage Bobbie to write is keeping him back in the school, and will do him a lasting

injury. But I have not time to talk any more ;
pray go."

Grace obeyed, singing over to herself—

"Es zieht ein stiller Engel
Durch dieses Erdenland ;
Zum Trost für Erdenmängel,
Hat ihn der Herr gesandt.
In seinem Blick ist Frieden
Und milde, sanfte Huld ;
O, folg' ihm stets hinieden,
Dem Engel der Geduld."

"Ruth may want the quiet angel of Patience sometimes," thought Grace, "but we want it too, when she is in one of her awfully practical and matter-of-fact moods. It is so tiresome to hear her boast of hating poetry, just as if it were a thing to be proud of, instead of ashamed of."

"Grace !"

It was Bobbie's voice ; he was going down the long passage towards his father's study, which was at the farther end. Books were in his hand, and giving his shoulders a shrug, he said,—

"I am going to be overhauled for the last month's work ; 'pity the sorrows of a poor old man !' "

"Of a poor idle boy, you mean," said Grace ;
"what is that ?"

"The English verse you set me at, rendered from the German—look ! pick it up," as a ruled sheet fell from his blotted exercise book, German and English.

"That is just what I was going to ask for," said Grace, "but pray, Bobbie, don't make papa angry to-day. Have you got through that proposition in Euclid yet ?"

"No ; and there was no angel of patience to help me. Here goes, however," and Bobbie vanished behind a projection in the passage which hid the door of the study.

Grace heard the soft opening and shutting of the said door, and then danced back to the sitting-room, where her presence was welcomed by her mother with a smile. The younger children were gone out with Martha, and the quiet of the room was undisturbed, while Grace conned over her German verse, and admired her brother's rendering of the same. The manuscript leaf was adorned with various clever pen-and-ink sketches too, illustrative of the poem ; and a figure of the Angel of Patience—bending over a little bed where a sick child lay, its mother sit-

ting near it, with a face of watching, and it might be prayer—was really very good. Grace took it to her mother.

“Look, mamma, is it not pretty? and all done with a few touches of pen and ink.”

“Ah, it is very pretty, Grace; but, my dear, if you have got the German ready for Herr Hirsch, I want to talk to you about Bobbie. Grace, he is frittering time away on things which please his own taste, and he is making no progress whatever in those studies which are the most important. You are his twin sister, and his favourite sister too. I think you might do more to help him to conquer his indolence and self-love than any one, if you tried.”

“Self-love, mamma! I am sure Bobbie is not selfish.”

“Perhaps not, in the general acceptance of the word; but it is love of his own tastes before our own which causes him to make no effort to please your father and me, and improve in those things which will be useful to him hereafter. Instead of encouraging him, Grace, to draw on every sheet and scrap of paper, and write his historical romances, dedicated to her gracious and

graceful highness, Grace, daughter of the house of Buxton"——

"Oh, mamma!" for Grace recognised the style and title of "The Beauty of Lewinsmoor," which had been Bobbie's last production.

"Instead of doing that, Grace, it would be more to the purpose to let some of your activity and brightness go towards waking up Bobbie to the needs of daily life. If he goes on as he is, he will be only a useless dreamer, I fear, and his 'candle' will never give light either at home or abroad."

"Mamma, I believe Bobbie would be a poet, and an artist, perhaps; but he will never do for hard work. He says he can get on very well with Latin and Greek in his own way; and you know his Latin verses have been marked for commendation again and again: but as to mathematics and all the dry stuff they go through at school, he never *will* get on with it."

"Because he does not choose to apply himself to it, Grace. It is useless to tell me he could not help covering his books with figures, and blotting his fingers, and wasting his time over imaginary heroes and heroines, when he ought to be working for the place in the school his father so longs to see him take. He knows we

are poor, and that it will be all but impossible to send him to Cambridge, unless he gets some help for himself in the way of a scholarship or exhibition. I talk to you about all this, Grace, because I think you may do more with Bobbie than any one, and sometimes I fear your own little head is too full of visions and dreams of impossible good, or rather what you fancy would be good; and I want to see you taking life—your young life—as a real, earnest matter, and looking for the flowers which shall blossom around you from persevering continuance in well-doing, not in new positions and different circumstances. Where God places us, there He means us to be happy, and to make others happy—to let our light shine.”

Grace bent down to kiss her mother, “Ah, but mamma, every one can’t be like you,—least of all me.”


“Most of all you, you mean, Grace. Does not Charity say you and Bobbie are ‘my living images’? By the by, how did the photograph go off?”

“Oh, I can’t have it till Wednesday. It was so horrid, sitting and standing for it, and being pulled about and smiled at by Mr Sanders, as

grinned at by Charity. Mamma, Charity's will be a funny likeness, I am certain. She was so amusing, she made even Mr Sanders laugh as he kept telling us to look 'naturally pleasing' for once."

The arrival of Herr Hirsch stopped any further conversation. Jennie and Ruth appeared with their books, and the girls were soon absorbed in their German lesson.

When they were half-way through it, the sudden slamming of the study door made Grace start, and the rosiest colour rushed to her cheeks. Again there was a quick shutting of the hall-door, and a figure passed the window. Grace and her mother both saw who it was, though it seemed impossible to believe that those hasty footsteps could be Bobbie's. But, nevertheless, Bobbie's they were. He ran out of the garden and turned off over the moor, never stopping till he reached an uneven, rugged place, where the ground made a sudden dip, called by courtesy in the neighbourhood Lewinsvale. The turf was fresher and greener here, and a little pool lay on one side, reflecting every prickle of the bank of furze bushes above it, and every petal of their golden bloom, in the days when



the wild bees hovered over them, and the pale blue moths darted swiftly in and out from beneath their cover, or a heavy, awkward cockchafer buzzed about on cumbrous wing. These days were not now, however. The air was cold and biting, as the sun of the last day of January sent out a few parting gleams over the wide expanse to the west, showing clearly the spires and towers of the Stonehouse churches, and the outline of several other towns of lesser note which lay in that direction.

The spot was a favourite resort of Bobbie Buxton's. He and Grace had passed many a happy hour here. Out of the beaten track, few people even passed near enough to interrupt them; and plenty of stories and verses, and pictures of word and pencil, too, were knocked off also. But this afternoon Bobbie's gaze did not linger on the beauty of the sunset or the effects of light and shade on the purple moorland. He had eye or thought for nothing around him. Lewinsvale was only desirable as a retreat where no one could see or hear him. Throwing himself on the grass, he buried his face in his hands, and cried for the very vexation and sadness of his heart.

Poor Bobbie! his father's rebukes and pained expressions of his disapprobation had cut the boy's soul to the quick. But when the storm had spent itself; and under the quiet beauty of the evening sky, where a few night stars began to shine bright and pure, Bobbie bent his steps homeward at his accustomed leisurely pace, there was no real resolution to bestir himself, and fight the battle against self and self-pleasing, to which he was called of God,—only a dull sense of distaste against the course which his father wished him to follow—only a feeling within him that he was hardly used, and that his father was very unkind to him, and that not all the scolding in the world would ever make him head of his form in the Lewinsea Grammar School, or ever see him competing for the Harper Exhibition, which that upstart young Bell was so proud of having taken last November.

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CHAPTER IV.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE Buxtons were all at tea on the Wednesday evening after Grace's visit to Mr Sanders, when Bobbie arrived from school.

"Better late than never," was Jenny's greeting, while Grace made room for her brother next her.

"We are earlier at tea to-night: it is Wednesday evening, you know," said Mrs Buxton; "but you are very late, Bobbie."

"Yes; I had to wait ever so long at Sanders'. Here they are at last!" he said, giving Grace a large envelope, with "Sanders, from Mayall's," on the seal.

Grace's colour came, and her hand trembled with eagerness as she opened the envelope. No photograph could possibly look as pretty as she did then; but these certainly fell far below the mark. There was an eager cry of, "Let me see!

let me see!" Then followed the variety of opinion which every one is always so ready to give when a likeness is displayed.

"Not a bit like," was the general verdict about the standing one; and "Half asleep, and rather affected," was Ruth's decided remark about the other.

As for Grace, she felt a pang of disappointment as she looked at this precise copy of herself, which photographs are supposed to be. Was she, after all, really like that constrained, affected girl, whose eyes seemed sunk into her head, and round whose mouth lurked such a dark shadow and such an uncomfortable expression? Where was her bright fair hair, and the roses of her cheek and lip? All was one leaden tinge, and Ruth's single word "grim," expressed it. Grace was almost ready to cry, and her mother, feeling sorry for her, diverted the general attention to Charity's carte, which called forth bursts of applause. Nothing could be better, and Tiny flew off to bring in the original, to look at herself leaning against Mr Sanders' large chair, or sitting square and defiantly pleasant on its edge.

"That's me, is it?" said Charity, half-puzzled as she looked at herself. "Deary me! how

exact the brooch is, and the crimped edge of my cap-strings. There's the little darned hole in the collar too, just the same as if it was real."

"But yourself, Charity—your face; isn't it like you?"

"Well, Miss Jenny," was the reply, holding the two small cards in her large hands, "yes, I suppose it's like: but it seems to me I know very little about my own face—perhaps because I haven't had time to think much about it. But where's the rest of them? I thought there was to be a dozen."

"You must choose the one you prefer, Charity," said Mrs Buxton, "and then the others will be printed. What do you think of Miss Grace?"

Mrs Buxton was sorry she asked the question, for Charity declared they were both shameful. "As to that man having a guinea for a dozen of them, it was an imposition;" and there is no telling how long Charity would have talked about them, had not Mr Buxton come in from the study, where he always had a cup of coffee alone on Wednesday evening, and asked who were going to church.

Three of the girls, Ruth, Jenny, and Susan,

ran up-stairs to get ready, and Grace remained with her mother.

"Mamma, will you send one of these photographs to Lady Melstone?" she asked when they were alone. "Are they like me?"

"Well, Grace, I must send the photograph to Aunt Grace, for it is, so to speak, her property; and as to the likeness, no one could doubt that the original of that little girl in the linsey frock was Grace Buxton. But now let us dismiss the 'pictures, as Charity calls them, and have a happy evening: the little ones will expect to be amused by a story before they go to bed, and then I hope Bobbie will have finished his lessons, and we can go on with our other book."

"When I have paid for these," Grace said, replacing the photographs in the envelope with a sigh, as she got a pencil and paper ready for Bobbie's drawing, and remembered that Tiny's worsted work had been left in a state of dire confusion the evening before—"when these horrid things are paid for, mamma, how much will be left?"

"Exactly nineteen shillings, my dear."

And to Grace Buxton nineteen shillings

sounded like a mine of wealth. All kinds of visions floated through her brain of what she should do with the money; and she was hardly present in spirit with her little sisters that evening. Children are always quick to detect when the mind of another is preoccupied: and Grace's reading was so unsatisfactory that Tiny at last said,—

“Please, mamma, read a little; Grace does not make it sound a bit like a little girl talking; it is all so dull.”

Mrs Buxton took the book, and gave Grace the work with which she was busy, and immediately the clear energetic tones arrested the little ones' attention, and Lillas multiplied her tumble-down houses with one window and a chimney at the side, while Tiny stitched away with good will at her worsted work, and Mabel's needle flew merrily along the hem of her pocket-handkerchief.

When the party came in from church, fresh and rosy with the walk in the clear frosty air, Ruth said—

“We heard feet pattering behind us all the way till we got to the Masons' cottage, and it turned out to be Mary Mason, with one of the

Gales whom she had taken to church. She is a very good girl, always so attentive at school, and getting on so fast. I think she will be ready to come here, mamma, when Martha goes to another place."

"She will be too young then, but the next time perhaps she will answer. I don't know any family I would rather help than the Masons. I feel sure their good example will have some effect on those poor people in the next cottage. Example does so much when words fail."

Mrs Buxton was quite right. Little by little Mrs Gale began to suspect that some of the fault lay with herself in those home miseries which weighed so heavily upon her; that if she had served God better, and brought up her children in His faith and fear—if she had been a gentle and industrious wife, instead of a noisy, untidy, and often indolent one—things might have been better with her family, and a cheerful well-ordered cottage like the Masons' have been attained even by her. Mary Mason, as she walked home from church with Hester Gale that evening, was throwing in her mite of influence. She had had some trouble to persuade

Hester to come to church in her shabby frock and battered hat ; but on the Saturday previously she had set herself to do as her mother had hinted, and had taken in her work to the Gales' cottage, and mended Hester's torn frock into the bargain, and stitched up several rents in her old hat, and sponged the greasy ribbons, thinking that Hester would be prevailed upon to go to church on Sunday ; but that was quite hopeless at present. "What, go with you in all your good clothes !" Hester had said, "No, indeed, I ain't going to show myself in that way." So the matter was compromised by a promise for Wednesday evening, and Mary, on the look-out for the clergyman to pass the cottage, seized Hester by the half-unwilling hand, and walked both to and from church behind the Buxtons.

"Well, don't you like going to church ?" Mary had inquired as the two girls were about to separate. "Isn't the singing nice ?"

"Yes," said Hester ; "but I couldn't make out much of what the parson said ; he was talking about lights and candles, wasn't he ?"

"Of course he was," said Mary, delighted. "Why, you must have been listening, Hester !

He was telling about the way we ought to try to be shining lights; the text was one we have learned in Sunday-school; we said it to Miss Buxton last Sunday." And Mary repeated, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

"Ah! that was it," said Hester, "not that I understand much about it; I feel dark and dreary-like myself—what with Henry took to prison, and father never coming home but to swear and rage about, and mother scolding and crying, and we just dragged and pushed about nohow! It's a deal worse since Henry was took away; he did come home good-tempered and pleasant anyhow, and gave me a silver sixpence once, and Fan a threepenny bit."

"Oh, Hester!" Mary exclaimed, and she was going to say what came uppermost—that very likely Henry had not come by the money honestly—when the remembrance of her mother's advice, "not to use too many words," stopped her. She bid poor Hester good-night, and ran home.

Standing on the threshold of the door a minute, Mary looked up at the glittering stars

and the crescent moon just sinking behind some clouds over the town, and a sense of thankfulness thrilled through the girl's heart, that those blessed words of our Lord were not altogether an enigma to her. "Father's and mother's lights shine at home," she thought; "it would be a shame if we did not try to shine a little in our small corner, as the verse says. And even in those days when father lay ill of the fever, and our little brother died, and we had scarcely bread enough to eat for a fortnight, it was hard, but it wasn't exactly dark, for God came and helped mother to bear up and shine then, sure enough." So musing in her simple way, Mary went into her humble home.

Time passed on and the days were lengthening fast, and Easter drew near. The photograph which had caused so many mingled feelings in Grace Buxton's heart was sent to its destination, and was not even acknowledged! Grace gave up at last looking out for the postman and taking care always to be first to meet him and get the letters; for the small crooked handwriting on the thick cream-coloured envelope, with its crest and cypher, Grace so anxiously looked for, never came, and the only conclusion to be ar—

rived at was, that Lady Melstone did not like the representation of her godchild, and had no desire to see the original. Once or twice Grace asked her mother what she thought was the reason of Lady Melstone's silence, and Mrs Buxton could only say that it was very like her aunt. She was always a person who followed the whim of the moment and had not much persistency of purpose about her. So the nineteen shillings lay in Grace's little purse; and that was all that was left to remind her of what had only a few weeks before seemed so important a matter and so full of promise for the future.

The home life went on very much as it always did, and Grace took her share as elder sister in the care of the younger ones—that is to say, she helped Ruth to keep their clothes in order, and assisted in turning the last summer's frocks, and lengthening petticoats and skirts, and re-trimming old jackets and capes.

"Must I really wear that alpaca dress of Ruth's, mamma, this spring?" Grace asked one evening. "Can't it be cut down for the younger ones, and mayn't I have a new one?"

"Well, dear, I hardly know; Ruth is so very

tall, and has grown so much the last year, while you are scarcely grown at all ; and as the dress fits you with very little alteration, it seems a pity you should not wear it."

"It's always the way," said Grace, colouring, while her eyes filled with tears. "I care for pretty, nice things, and Ruth does not care one bit what she has on. She rather glories in ugly things—just as she glories in her matter-of-factness and her prosy nature."

"Use the right word, Grace," said Ruth ; "you mean 'prosaic' I believe. If you want a new frock, use your own money to buy it ; there is Lady Melstone's grand present left, and you have a few shillings beside."

"I don't want your advice, Ruth," said Grace, peevishly. "I shall do as mamma likes, but your opinion makes no difference to me."

In a large family there will be discordant notes sometimes ; but the deep pain any jar or quarrel gave the mother of these children often acted as a spell in repressing bickerings in her presence. Now she sighed as she said,

"Dear children, you are far too sensible to quarrel about such a thing as this ; do not let us think any more about the frocks now."

"I suppose, mamma, I *may* spend that money as I choose?"

"Of course, my dear, it is yours to do what you like with."

"Now you have given up running to meet the postman for Lady Melstone's letter, you had better console yourself with what is within your reach."

"Ruth," said Mrs Buxton, and this time the voice was very grave and displeased.


Ruth shrugged her angular shoulders, and bit her lip: "Grace deserves a sharp hit sometimes, she is so silly." And as Grace left the room to conceal her tears, she added, "She has so many people to adore her in this house, her head is turned; it is a pity she can't go to Rockton and live there."

"It is a pity you cannot be more gentle and conciliating, you had better say. Dear Ruth, when shall I make you see the excellence of refraining at times even from *good* words? A great deal that you often say to Grace is true; but then it is disagreeably said, and only does her harm, while you injure yourself more by being so censorious and harsh. Invaluable as you are to us, my child—my right hand in

many things—you pain me by your hard judgments of others; and I fear so much that you will not win love amongst the children as time goes on, unless you see where your mistake lies and set yourself to remedy it.”

“It is very ungrateful, I think.” Ruth’s voice trembled. “I do all I can for the others. I often put little things in Grace’s way which I know she will like; but because I don’t flatter her as Bobbie and Mabel and Charity do, and pretend to like all her verse-making and romantic nonsense, she complains of me to you, and goes crying out of the room like a baby. Mother, I *must* be true—I never will say what I don’t mean, or seem to agree with people when I don’t agree with them. I must be true.”

Ruth Buxton *was* true: but she made the mistake, so common in these days, of fancying bluntness and brusqueness are the needful accompaniments of truthfulness. It is the highest attainment of Christian courtesy that “our sincerity should have kindness in it, and our kindness truth.”



CHAPTER V.

THE WISH IS GRANTED.

OLD and young know what it is to long for something very earnestly—to picture a bright future; and miss, perhaps, the pleasures of a peaceful present. And then, when the desire is granted, after all, there is a blank and an unsatisfied feeling, a mingling of bitter with the sweet, and a sense of disappointment. So it is with all earthly hopes and desires which are indulged in too eagerly. So it was to be with that cherished hope of Grace Buxton's, that she should pay her godmother a visit. She had been unsettled and restless about it ever since she had sent the photograph to Rockton, and just as hope faded, as weeks passed away, and still no notice was taken of it, and no invitation came, so in equal proportion did Grace's wish to go strengthen.

"I can't think what makes you so keen about it," Bobbie said, one holiday afternoon, as he

lay with his hands folded behind his head, and his feet beating a slow tattoo on the grass in Lewinsvale. "I can't think why you want to go and see a crabbed old woman like that."

"Well, Bobbie," Grace would reply, "I am not quite certain myself about all my reasons: but I should like to see Rockton, and live in a house with everything nice, just for once, and have plenty of time to read just what I liked: go to a concert, perhaps, and hear some good music: and oh, a hundred other things! Of course I would rather you came also, or even Mabel or Jenny; and *if* I went, perhaps you might come too, Bobbie."

"Thank you, I beg to be excused. A frightful bore it would be to have to play the agreeable for a month."

"Well," said Grace, with a sigh, "we are not likely to be tried. But, Bobbie, are your lessons ready for to-morrow? We ought to go home now."

"My lessons! Oh, yes; they'll do very well. By the by, Grace," he said, as he gathered himself up, and shook back his hair from his forehead, while Grace picked up his cap, which had fallen off, "I have my wishes too. I wish I

had done with this stupid Lewinsea Grammar School; I wish I could follow my own bent—go and study under an artist; and not get bullied for all my drawings, as I do. Only to-day my father tore a leaf out of my theme-book. And, Grace, there *was* something in that. I know there was. It was rather hard to see it torn like that. Mamma would say it was a shame.”

“I daresay it was because the drawing was in one of your lesson books that papa was angry. Besides”——

“Besides what?”

“He has told you many times not to scrawl over the books; and I suppose it was disobedience, Bobbie.”

“Scrawl!” repeated Bobbie, scornfully.

“Oh, I know your drawings are beautiful,” Grace hastily interposed. “But papa does not care about any pictures, you know. Ruth is like him in that. Still, of course, he wants you to get on at school, and go to college; and if you *could* get the Harper scholarship”——

“Don’t harp on that Harper, pray, Grace; it is no good, I can tell you. It is about as un-

likely that I should get the scholarship as that you should go to Rockton."

But unlikely things do come to pass. The very next morning after this conversation the letter—the long-expected letter—arrived,—the thick cream-coloured envelope, the elaborate cypher, in pale violet and gold, G.L.R.M., the small, cramped handwriting! As Mrs Buxton opened and read the letter, she handed it at once to her husband, with the question, "What is to be done?"

Mr Buxton read it, and returned it to his wife with the words, "We must talk it over; and Grace must be put out of her misery as soon as possible. Grace, do you still want to go to Rockton?"

Thus publicly appealed to, Grace blushed crimson; but said, "Yes, papa, please," very decidedly.

"The day after to-morrow, eh?"

"The day after to-morrow. Our birthday?" Grace said, in a dismayed tone.

"Yes, if at all, then. But mamma and I must hold a cabinet council first. Now this is the morning when I take you two elder girls for Latin and arithmetic. Come as quickly as you

can to the study, for it is half-past eight. Bobbie, my boy, don't be all day hunting up your books; and when you have found them, don't draw over every possible corner. You must ask your mother about the leaf from your theme book—she says it is too pretty to be wasted, and will keep it among her treasures. But, my boy,” and his father laid his hand on his shoulder, “remember those simple and familiar words when you are tempted to draw all the imagination of your brain; ‘To do my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me.’ Clearly it is not your duty to waste the time I appoint to you for study in these pretty fancies. Now, girls!”

As the children departed in various directions, something impelled Bobbie to go to the sofa, and bend over his mother. She returned his kiss, taking the sweet and almost too pretty face between her hands.

“Bobbie, is your duty so difficult? Is the path your father has marked out for you so hard to follow?”

“I want to be an artist, mother. I want to be able to paint pictures; to live out of doors, and watch the sky; to travel in beautiful

countries, and see the snow mountains and the lakes of Switzerland, and the glorious churches and cathedrals at home and abroad. I hate the drudgery of this Grammar School, where I am always being outdone by a lot of fellows who just go on like a set of machines, and are common-minded and snobbish."

"That ugly word, Bobbie! there is no beauty in that. My dear boy, be patient. Set yourself to do your father's bidding, and you may effect more than you think possible. Do not shape out your future just as your fancy leads you to imagine would be the most charming; only pray for patience—for patient continuance in well-doing."

Bobbie sighed, tossed the hair off his forehead, and strolled off towards school—stumbling over a knot of little sisters at the door, who were holding a grave consultation about the letter from Lady Melstone, and wondering whether Grace would really go to Rockton.

Mr and Mrs Buxton held their cabinet council, and Grace was finally summoned to hear the decision.

"Grace," said her father, drawing her towards him, "your godmother, Lady Melstone, proposes

to receive you for a visit for six months—say till next Christmas. She offers to give you the advantage of any lessons you may like to have—music, drawing, and German or French. She goes on to say that six months being over, you may wish to return home, and she may wish it also; but you will be free to exercise your own will, if she should happen to like you well enough to keep you with her always.”

“Oh, no, papa,” Grace now interposed. “Oh, no! I could not bear to be away from you always. Indeed, six months is too long—much too long.”

“Well, these are the terms of the agreement,” Mr Buxton went on. “I must tell you the whole; and I must also tell you your mother’s and my own views about it. Our worldly means are very small; we are in no position to spend more than we now do on the education of the children; but the burden lies too heavily on your mother as it is. We think you, with your good abilities, Grace, might benefit from this visit to your aunt, and that your sisters might benefit from it afterwards. But we think it right to tell you, Grace, that Lady Melstone has never had any children of her own, that she lost

her husband early, and has never had occasion to give up her own will to others in her daily life. Consequently, in spite of the fine house and the carriage to drive in, and the pretty things and the charming books, you may find some rough places in your path at Rockton. From what little I have heard of Lady Melstone, and from what your mother knows from personal experience, I think it is safe to predict there will be thorns as well as roses for you. So now you are free to decide as to what you will do. You will be fifteen the day after to-morrow, the day which is proposed for your journey: and you are quite old enough to choose whether you will accept the invitation or refuse it."

"Our birthday!" Grace exclaimed. "I don't think—I don't really think I could go on Bobbie's and my birthday, papa. Why must it be then?"

"For this reason: because some friends or acquaintances of Lady Melstone's are coming on a visit to Mr Vernon's to-day, and will go on to Rockton the day after to-morrow—the 30th of April, is it not? If this opportunity of an escort for you is missed, it might be long before another occurred. Now take an hour to make

up your mind, my child ; only let me know by post-time. The collect for Whit Sunday has a sentence in it which exactly expresses your need, and all our needs : pray ' for a right judgment in all things,' Grace."

Her father's voice was very grave and loving, and he kissed her as he spoke, and left the room. Grace knelt down by her mother's sofa—that refuge for all her children—and burst into tears of perplexity and doubt.

" Oh, mamma, tell me what I should do. Shall I go ? "

" My darling, we wish you to do as you feel disposed. No child can leave us without leaving a sad blank behind ; but, my Grace, it may be good for you to see for yourself all that riches and worldly prosperity can do, and all that they fail to do. It may send you back to us more content with shabby frocks, and "——

" Oh, mamma, don't ; please don't. I can't think what I shall do."

And Grace went away to her room, and looked out over the moor, over which the purple shadows were flitting as the light, fleecy clouds sailed about in the soft blue April sky. " A right judgment in all things." Grace prayed the

prayer; but not with a thorough surrender of her heart. Then she sought Charity's counsel; and Charity was very strong in her advice that she should go by all means. "A thousand pities she shouldn't," Charity thought; though she took care to add, "The light of the house would go out with her."


At last Grace heard her father calling her name from the study-door.

"Yes, papa!"

"What shall I say to Lady Melstone, Grace? I am going to Lewinsea, and can post my letter, and leave word with Mrs Vernon that you will join her friends or *not* join them at the station on Thursday morning at ten o'clock. Well, Grace, which is it to be?"

"Papa, I will go, please," and having made the decision, Grace ran up-stairs again, and, burying her face in her hands, cried heartily.

But soon the excitement of preparation for her journey wholly engrossed her. Moreover, the mere fact of one of the birds taking a flight from the nest, gave the bird herself a temporary importance amongst the other fledglings; for the Buxtons' family circle had never yet been broken up.





"Ruth sat by the chest of drawers, sewing."

It is a different matter when there are the constant goings and comings of brothers to school; or when the mother is in good health, and pays a visit to a friend or relation, and takes a child with her; or a large income admits of a yearly migration to a watering-place. Except the clergyman's fortnight, which Mr Buxton took as a holiday occasionally—going away on one Monday and returning on the Saturday-week following—arrivals and departures were rare things amongst the Buxtons. Journeys were among the expensive luxuries which could not be thought of; and change—that specific for all ailments in these days—was so clearly out of the question, that the expediency of it never presented itself for discussion.

There was a complete overlooking of all Grace's little wardrobe and possessions; and a very pretty blue muslin which Mrs Buxton had amongst her own dresses was tucked in the skirt and altered in the waist, to suit Grace.

The last night came, and Grace, tired and excited, went early to the bed she shared with Ruth. She had been asleep an hour, and on awaking was surprised to see a candle still burning, while Ruth sat by the chest of drawers

sewing. It was Grace's blue muslin that lay across her knee, and her back was turned to the bed.

"Ruth!" Grace exclaimed. "Ruth!"

Ruth started: "I thought you were sound asleep, Gracie." (The added syllable to her name was in itself a sign of a softened mood. Ruth, as a rule, despised diminutives.)

"What are you doing?"

"Only putting a bit of lace into the neck of your muslin frock for you. It is my birthday present."

"Oh, Ruth!" said Grace, springing out of bed, and looking at the real Valenciennes with the eye of an amateur. "What a lovely bit of lace. Where did you get it?"

"Never mind that. There is a bit to fall over the wristbands too; it looks better than thick work on a thin dress like this."

"Oh, Ruth! how kind you are. Dear old Ruth, kiss me—a good kiss the last night."

Ruth bent lower over her work, only moving her cheek just a little bit round for her sister to kiss.

"Ruth," Grace persisted, "look at me, and let me thank you. I believe you bought that


lace for me," and Grace forcibly turned her sister's face towards her own. There was something in those dark steadfast eyes which made Grace say—

"Will you miss me much, Ruth? Will you want me back?"

Ruth struggled hard to speak calmly, but it would not do; with a sort of gasp, which ended in a flood of tears, she managed to get out—

"Miss you, Grace! I don't make a fuss about my feelings: I may not seem kind sometimes, but no one loves you, Grace, better than I do."

And so the sisters mingled their tears. So the coming separation taught each how deep and true was the sisterly love which perhaps neither had ever realised before.



CHAPTER VI.

GRACE'S JOURNEY.

THE good-byes were all said. The next morning, the morning of Grace Buxton's fifteenth birthday she found herself by ten o'clock standing with her father on the platform of the Lewinsea Station. Bobbie was there, too, and though he whistled a tune and tried hard to appear indifferent, it was only too evident that the pain of losing Grace was keenly felt.

"You will write to me, Bobbie," she said, catching at the only available means of intercourse, as those who are about to part always do.

"You will write to me too, Gracie," was the rejoinder; "and I'll take care to puzzle the Rockton postman with a pictorial address."

"Oh, I don't know whether you must do that; but there is plenty of drawing-paper for you now; and so pray, please don't get into scrapes by drawing on the exercise-books."



"I know," he rejoined; "it *was* kind of you to give me that box of colours, Grace; Winsor and Newton's, too! I am sorry you spent so much on me; mine is a poor shabby birthday present in comparison."

"Oh, no, it is not, indeed; it is a very nice writing case. It will be so useful to me; and I shall want writing-paper for home letters. Oh, here they come, I suppose!" And Grace saw her father emerging from the waiting-room with three fashionably-dressed ladies, to whose protection Grace was committed by Mr Buxton.

"It is very kind of you to allow my little girl to travel with you," he said. "The opportunity of such an escort seemed too good to be lost; so Grace has made a very hurried departure from home."

"Oh, I am sure we are delighted to have her! My dear, I think we had better get into our carriage, as the train is come up. Martin," turning to a man servant, "will you see Miss Buxton's luggage is labelled for Rockton, and see that it is taken out with ours?"

"I have already had the box labelled," Mr Buxton said. "Now, Grace."

One more convulsive grasp of Bobbie's hand,

one more almost desperate clinging to her father's neck, and Grace was seated in the middle of a first-class carriage, which seemed a very hot and stuffy abiding-place on this lovely morning, when April was about to melt into May.

Grace sat forward to the last, her eyes fixed on her father and Bobbie; while the Vernons made themselves comfortable, arranged all their little possessions, and leaned back with the air of practised travellers; just as coolly and indifferently as they would seat themselves in their morning room at home, to write letters, or to read, or be busy about some bit of fancy needlework. Grace's manner was quite the reverse of this. She was anxious and troubled; and had more than she could quite manage to prevent the breaking forth of the heavy sobs which she tried so hard to suppress. In spite of all her efforts some large and very inconvenient tears would roll down her cheeks; and after a few attempts at conversation, of a common-place kind, her companions gave her up, and, to her great relief, left her to her own thoughts.

How was it that parting from home, only for

an eagerly-desired visit too, was so tearful a business? How was it that she dwelt tenderly on the little details which were in themselves often wearisome to her?—the children's lessons, now going on at Moor End Cottage; the great basket of work by her mother's side, out of which the elder girls every day took their portion; the tumultuous rush up-stairs of the little ones, at eleven o'clock, to prepare for their walk; Charity's questions on some housekeeping difficulty; Ruth's matter-of-fact decision about it. How was it that as the number of miles increased between Grace and her home her affection for everything there increased too, and she forgot all her longings for change and a more luxurious manner of life, and plenty of books and music and pretty things, and remembered only her mother's loving face, which she must spend so many weeks without seeing; her conversations with her father in the study; and, above all, her walks with Bobbie—dearest and best old Bobbie—who would miss her so, and want her every evening to consult about a romance of brush or pencil, or about the fate of one of his heroines?

But Grace Buxton's is a common experience

with us all. We wish for something very much; that something possesses our thoughts, and colours everything we do or say: the desire is granted; and to our surprise we find the reality is very different to the anticipation; and that the satisfaction to be gathered from *the faithful performance of little daily duties* is ten times greater than the pleasure from which we expected so much.

The long journey to Rockton passed without much interest. The carriage had to be changed several times, and each time Mrs Vernon asked Grace if she had all her things safely; begged her own daughters to be careful to leave nothing in the carriage they quitted; and indulged in the usual complaints against the trouble of changing at junctions and the miseries of little comfortless waiting-rooms. Once or twice there were additions to the number in the carriage, a lady with her nurse and a baby who cried unceasingly, and whose presence was anything but welcome. Then a merry-faced girl and her mother; then an old gentleman, who had a stock of all the daily papers, and handed them to his fellow-travellers with a courteous bow, but entered into no conversation, though he glanced

inquisitively at Grace from time to time, and could not satisfactorily settle what relationship she held to the three stylish ladies under whose protection he saw she was.

At last, about six o'clock in the evening, Mrs Vernon and her daughters began to prepare for the final move, and told Grace they should be in Stokesbridge in a few minutes. Grace's surprise was great to find herself in a murky, smoky atmosphere, as the train glided up to a wide platform, where a whole regiment of porters stood ready to lay their hands on the doors of the carriages as they came to a stand-still, and assist the passengers to identify their luggage, which was turned out at the farther end.

"I suppose Lady Melstone will send to meet you, my dear," Mrs Vernon said. "Martin will find your luggage. Ah! there it is, all right!" as Martin appeared with a truck piled up with boxes, which a porter wheeled swiftly along the platform, where poor little Grace stood close to the Vernons, utterly bewildered and perplexed.

"This is not Rockton, is it?" she asked of Miss Vernon. "I thought Rockton was a country place, and pretty."

"Oh, this is Stokesbridge, you know; you

have to drive up to Rockton ; we go in an opposite direction, to Mapleton. Has no one come to meet you ? ”

“ I am sure I don’t know ; I never saw my aunt.”

“ Lady Melstone is not very likely to come to meet you,” said Miss Vernon, with a curious laugh ; “ but some of her servants will do so, I should hope. Mamma, what is to be done about Miss Buxton ? ”

The name arrested the attention of a very plainly-dressed young woman, who had nevertheless an air of superiority about her.

“ Is this Miss Buxton ? ” she inquired, advancing to Grace, and holding out her hand at the same time for the little bag and umbrella she carried, and the shepherd’s plaid shawl which hung over her arm.

“ Yes,” said Mrs Vernon, who had begun to be afraid that Grace might be left on her hands to be sent up to Rockton. “ You are Lady Melstone’s maid, I suppose. Miss Buxton’s luggage is gone down with ours ; we had better follow it.” And then, with good-byes spoken with some sense of relief on both sides, Grace followed her new escort down a flight of ---

wide and very dirty steps, and soon after found herself seated in a comfortable and luxurious carriage, *vis à vis* to the maid, who inquired if she would have both windows down, and answered her question as to whether it was far to Rockton in a pleasant though perfectly respectful voice. Grace began to wish the drive might prove a long one, so pleasant it was to be rolling along in that easy carriage; and she was interested too in looking at the church towers of Stokesbridge which came in view at the angle of many a narrow dirty street. Emerging from the labyrinth of these, Grace looked out on a wide quay and shipping, all bathed in the glow of the western sun, which threw parting gleams over the stone bridge and the gables of the old warehouses flanking the river. Then came a square, shaded by trees; and to Grace's questioning and admiring glance Mrs Moore said,—

“That is the cathedral, Miss Buxton; and this is called Scholar's Green; we shall be in Orchard Street directly.”

Grace had plenty of time to examine the shops on either side of Orchard Street, for the sleek carriage-horses crept leisurely up one of

the steepest hills which daily traffic ever counters, and the ascending foot-passengers kept pace with the carriage, while those descending looked full into the windows as they tripped or jogged swiftly down the smooth pavement. At last the top was gained, and the progress of the carriage was again tolerably rapid, before Grace's heart had time to beat with any added anxiety or nervousness, it stopped before a house in an imposing row, with oak painted doors and tiers of large plate-glass windows, looking over the wide pavement to a garden surrounded by iron railings, stiffly laid out and trimly kept, which were known as "Alexandria Square Gardens;" the best kept all Rockton.

Grace's time of probation was now come; she had to walk into the hall alone and follow a gray-haired butler up a long and rather dark staircase, to the drawing-room door. It opened, and Grace heard her name—Miss Buxton—and then the door was shut behind her, and she was left to advance over a scarlet carpet to the farther end of the room, where by the fire, a lady was sitting, a newspaper in her hand, and a very small dog, with a red

lar, at her feet. The small dog set up a deafening chorus of barks and growls. Grace wondered how such a small creature could produce so much noise ; and the sheet of the newspaper was lowered, and Lady Melstone held out her hand.

"Well ! is it you at last ? Be quiet, pet : be quiet, Velvet ; *you* needn't be jealous. Come here, child ; you are not afraid of a sweet little doggie, I hope ? "

"Oh, no," Grace faltered, and then she went up to the arm-chair, and was about to stoop down and kiss her aunt, when she was discouraged by a little quick injunction ; "Take care ; you will upset my table." Then Lady Melstone offered her cheek, and Grace touched it, and that was all.

"You have a very wide hat, my dear ; take it off, that I may see your face."

Poor Grace obeyed ; the colour coming to her cheeks, and the tears ready to come to her eyes.

"Humph ! you are like what I remember your mother—very like ; and I am glad of it ; but you want a little modernising. How old are you ? "



"Fifteen—fifteen to-day," Grace said.

"Ah, well! you are small for your age; but you seem to have missed the gawky angular phase at present, though you may come to it yet. Now, you must go to your room and I will tell Moore to see that Susan waits on you. You are old enough to dine with me, of course. I dine at half-past seven."

Lady Melstone's ring, twice repeated, was answered by Mrs Moore, and Grace was taken by her to her room—another long flight above the drawing-room—and asked for her key, which had been carefully placed in the postage-stamp pocket of her little purple morocco purse. Then her box was opened, and the blue muslin, with Ruth's lace on the neck, came first, and was laid on the bed. The very sight of this was too much for poor Grace; a sense of desolation and loneliness swept over her, and, in spite of all her efforts, she began to cry.

Mrs Moore seemed to take no notice of this, but disappeared almost directly, soon to return with a cup of tea and a biscuit. She moved very quietly, and put the tray down on a small table by the window, then drawing a chair to it, said—

"I think, Miss Buxton, you are over-tired with your long journey ; if you drink this you will feel better. I must go and dress her ladyship now, but I will come to you again in time to get you ready for dinner."

Grace was thankful to be left to herself, and having followed Mrs Moore's advice and taken the tea, she found less difficulty in stopping her tears. If she cried much more her eyes would be so red and swollen, that she would be sure to be questioned as to the cause of her distress when she went down to dinner ; so she sprang up and began the work of dressing by herself, brushing out her long golden hair and exchanging her gray alpaca for the blue muslin, and then arranging all her little possessions on the table and in the drawers of the wardrobe. She felt the better for the exertion, and began to admire the room,—the pretty rosebud chintz hangings with their pink lining, the green mossy carpet with its white flowers, the dressing-table with its snowy cover, and the large looking-glass placed so that as Grace saw her face in it she saw also her back in a long pier mirror which she thus discovered. The houses in Alexandria Square were very high, and Grace was nearly at

the top of No. 5. The view from the window was much more extensive than that from the drawing-room. Grace could see over the churchyard, which lay across the square, to the open country, far away beyond dirty, smoky Stokes-bridge; and distant church spires were visible, and white hamlets creeping up green slopes, and knots of fir-trees cresting some high hills.

"Those can't be the Rockton Downs," Grace thought; "but what a lovely evening! Oh, if I had only some one here of my own—my very own"— A light tap at the door stopped the soliloquy, and Mrs Moore again entered, saying the bell for dinner would not ring for ten minutes; she hoped Miss Buxton was rested, and could she not assist her?

"No, thank you," was Grace's reply; "we do everything for ourselves at home. If you will tell me if my hair is neat at the back, I don't want anything else."


Moore took a brush, and smoothed over the thick roll of hair as she was desired, and then took in at a glance that her lady would not be satisfied with the blue muslin with the old-fashioned sleeves, and would perhaps be blind to what Moore had discovered from the first—that

Grace herself was one of the prettiest girls she had ever seen.

Grace was glad to find the drawing-room empty when she reached it. She had time to look at everything and comment upon it.

Yes, there was here gathered together all that little Grace had often longed after—beautiful pictures, gems of photographs in small carved frames standing on side-tables, ornaments of every kind and description, books—oh, how many books!—flowers, cut flowers, and stands of flowers, and ferns; and a balcony, on which the enormous plate-glass windows opened, was also full of flower-pots tastefully arranged. Everything was pretty. And just as she was standing before one of the choicest little water-colour drawings, and longing that Bobbie should see it too, it was hard to be awakened by the clang of the dinner-bell, and to hear her aunt's voice close behind,—

“Come, child, don't you want your dinner?” and then an uplifted brow and an exclamation, “You look something like an old picture yourself in that gown of your mother's; for it must have been made in the year one. Never mind! never mind! we will soon set that right. It is



quite commendable of your mother not to spend too much on dress—poor clergymen's wives can't do that; but whatever possessed Ruth Greville to marry into poverty as she did I can't imagine. The world is full of puzzles; have you found that out yet?"

This was said on the way down the long staircase to dinner—the dinner for which Grace had no appetite, but which was to Lady Melstone a very serious business. Grace turned with loathing from the rich white soup, the highly-flavoured rissoles and cutlets, and longed—yes, absolutely longed—for a bit of Charity's plain rice-pudding, or bread-cake, where the currants were not within sight of one another perhaps, but which was wholesome food nevertheless. Such a heavy hour as that dinner Grace had seldom passed.

Then followed another, equally dreary, in the drawing-room, when, as the clock chimed half-past nine with its silvery voice, Grace said—

"May I go to bed?"

"To bed? Yes. Another evening I hope you will be brighter; it is the time I feel the best, and I shall like a game of chess, or to hear you read, you know. To-morrow we will see about your lessons. Music and drawing, are

they not to be?—and French. Your mother says you have never had a native to teach you French, so your accent—don't be offended—can't be good. Good night, my dear ; good night."

Grace accepted her dismissal, and ran upstairs to her room to throw herself upon the bed and cry as if her heart would break.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SCHOOL-GIRLS OF LEWINSMOOR.

ONE of the gravest lessons we have to learn we go through life is that, which like most others, we are taught by experience—that circumstances of outward prosperity or sorrow do not of themselves necessarily make us either happy or miserable. We may fancy that we should be very different if the things and the people around us were different—if we were like one of our neighbours or friends—had the health, their money, their influence, or the pleasant house. To think thus, is, however, a great mistake; our business is to make our light shine where God appointeth our dwelling, and we may be tolerably certain, if it does not shine there, it would not shine in any other place. In the humble life, and in the higher classes too, it is ever the same. All are prone—young and old, rich and poor—to excuse failings in temper, and shortcomings and neglect of plain duty, by the plea of circumstances.

Poor Hester Gale had, perhaps, more excuse for her repining than many have, for her home was a miserable one. But she had made no effort to make things better; and when Mary Mason first tried to tempt her to come to church and Sunday-school, to keep her hair tidy, to mend her frocks, and to be kind and useful to her poor mother and Charlie, the answer was generally—

“ If I was you I would ; but it’s no good my trying on such things. It’s all very well for you ; but we are such a lot,—we are always quarrelling and miserable.”

Sometimes Mary would feel inclined to give up trying to be neighbourly to Hester. Had it not been for her mother she would have done so ; but Mrs Mason encouraged her by example more than by words, knowing that the surest way to benefit ourselves is to be patient in our efforts to help others.

Mary Mason had come in from the Gales’ cottage one Saturday afternoon, about a month after Grace Buxton had gone to Rockton, when her mother, who was in the back kitchen, called to her—

“ Mary, my dear ; is that you ? ”

"Yes, mother."

"Come here. I have just seen Miss Buxton; she was taking a walk with the little ones, and looked in here. She says, dear, that Martha Golding, their servant girl, has got a place in Lewinsea, and she is to go to it next week. Miss Buxton did not quite know, but she thought you might do, perhaps, for them.

"Oh, mother!" said Mary, joyfully. "Oh, mother!"

"Well, there are fors and againsts in this case, as in most cases, my dear. You are of great use at home: it would be strange if you were not, when I have laboured to put you into good ways. Still, service is what I look to for you, and no home can be better for a start than the clergyman's, under Charity's teaching too, and seeing how beautiful the lady there manages everything, and how Miss Buxton is not what you would meet with every day. I am not blind to all these good points, child; but you are so young, though you are so tall and handy, and, maybe, your father's house is the best place for you for another year or so."

All the time Mrs Mason was talking she was busy preparing the Sunday dinner, and Mary

stood by nervously playing with the strings of her hat, and her whole face betraying her anxiety.

"Oh, mother! I should like to go and live at Mrs Buxton's. Martha Golding says"——

"Never mind what Martha says. What I want you to do, Mary, is to try to find out, and to wish to find out, what is your duty. I'll talk to father about it when he comes in to supper, and you'll have a day to turn it over in your mind; then, when Monday comes, please God all is well, I will tell you whether or no you shall go to speak to Mrs Buxton or not, about going to Moor End Cottage."

"I have been hearing Hester say over her collect for to-morrow, mother; but she'll never learn it. Why, our little ones here knew it better; and yet I don't wonder, they are all so noisy there, and so"——

Mary stopped short. Her mother never encouraged gossip about the Gales, and her children were not slow to understand her looks. So Mary went to put away her hat and jacket, and to see that all her own and her little sisters' clean things were ready for Sunday, and then to set the table for tea, and get the children in from

their play in the strip of garden behind the cottage. Mary was, after all, but a child at heart ; and not more earnestly did Grace Buxton look forward to a visit to Rockton than she did to going out to service. "So nice to be able to earn money, and send some home to mother ; to learn to do everything nicely, to wear pretty white caps and aprons, like Martha Golding, who was now going to a place with ten pounds a year, and everything found !"

Monday morning came, and Mary's delight was great when her mother said—

"I'll step up to Moor End with you, my dear. Father and I think it is right for you to offer yourself, as Miss Buxton mentioned it ; but you mustn't be down-hearted, Mary, if Mrs Buxton does not think you old enough. I did hear that one of Betsy Thompson's girls was likely to go to Moor End."

"What, Nelly Thompson, mother : I don't believe it ; she is so stuck up and smart, and wears flowers outside her hat. I don't believe Mrs Buxton will have *her*."

This was said in a tone of superiority, which did not escape her mother's notice.

"Mary," she said, "Nelly Thompson is a

widow's child, and there are so many of them, poor things! It seems to me very likely Mrs Buxton will be glad to help them by trying Nelly at least. I have often heard you say she was a quick, clever girl at school, and Mrs Thornton thinks well of her; so don't set your heart too much on being taken in preference to her."

But Mary did set her heart very much on it nevertheless, and felt certain in her own mind that she should be chosen before Nelly Thompson. Very great, then, was her disappointment when Mrs Buxton kindly told her mother that Nelly being older, and the daughter of a hard-working, industrious mother, who had no husband to help her to earn bread for her seven children, she thought it right to give her a chance of being fitted for a servant under Charity's eye.

"Your turn may yet come, you know," she said, with a smile, to Mary, "and I dare say you are of great use at home; and I am very sure you can learn a great deal from your mother."

Mary's eyes were ready to overflow, and Mrs Buxton felt sorry for her; but she began to tell her how pleased Mr Buxton and Ruth were that

she had persuaded Hester Gale to come to Sunday-school at last; and then she spoke to Mrs Mason about the Gales, and was struck with the tender and gentle way in which Mrs Mason responded. No shadow of self-importance or self-congratulation spoiled the simple narrative of the Gales' miserable home, of the delicate and continually ailing wife, the sickly baby Charlie, and the unkind and too often drunken husband.

"Still, ma'am, I do see a little improvement, and I have great hopes of Hester, poor lassie; a kind look and a little motherly word, such as I give to Mary here, is not lost on her. She's mending in many ways, and I tell Mary, such near neighbours as we are, almost under the same roof, we may give the Gales a help, by trying to let them see that all Mr Buxton's good teaching is not thrown away upon us. There's more done by sight than by hearing any day."

"Yes, indeed, you are right, Mrs Mason. Example, and what we *are*, not what we seem to be, is the grand thing; if our actions contradict our words, we do so much harm. Mary, I hope, will not give up Hester, or the other poor girl either; and by the time Nelly Thompson's time with us has expired, Mary may be

ready to come, perhaps, and Hester may be so improved that she may return your good offices by helping you, Mrs Mason, when you have lost Mary."

The idea that her coming to Moor End Cottage was only postponed, not utterly given up, comforted Mary; and she walked home by her mother's side less miserable than she had at first expected to be. I will not say that Nelly Thompson's disagreeable toss of her head that day at school called forth no angry feelings; but Mary bit her lips, and suppressed a sharp retort, as in coming out of school, Nelly said—

"So you've been poking in yourself at Mr Buxton's, and thinking *you* would be chosen before *me*. A likely matter, when I am a head and shoulders taller than you, let alone a year and a half older! You got your answer, I expect."

"I got a very kind answer, Nelly," said poor Mary; and she could not help wondering if Mr or Mrs Buxton could hear Nelly talk sometimes, and see her ways with her school-fellows, whether she would have been chosen for the coveted place at Moor End Cottage, though she was a poor struggling widow's child, and had such a meek,

pleasant manner when in the presence of her superiors.

Charity was almost as much disappointed as Mary herself, when Mrs Buxton told her that Nelly Thompson was to come to supply Martha Golding's place on the following day, and Charity made no secret of her disapprobation. Mrs Buxton only said,—

“Mary Mason, Charity, has home advantages such as very few girls in her class of life possess. I cannot deny she would have been far pleasanter for us than Nelly as a little maid; but you must take double your usual pains with Nelly, Charity. She must try to get a good place, in order to help her mother; and we must all do what we can to teach her.”

“Indeed, ma'am,” said Charity, “I'll do my endeavours for your sake, to see that the girl learns her work, and gets into good ways; but as to saying I am as well pleased to do it as I should be if Mary Mason was the one, I won't pretend that it is so, for it isn't.”

“It is quite right to be honest, Charity,” said Mrs Buxton, smiling, as Charity stood smoothing down her large bony arms with either hand as she talked; for Charity's sleeves were tucked

up for the morning's work, and she had been called hastily from it to receive her mistress's orders for the day, which the Masons' visit had a little postponed. "But we must always try to be just, and Nelly Thompson stands high at school, both in the week and on Sundays, for good behaviour, industry, and regular attendance."

"Does she, ma'am?" was Charity's reply; and then, with her hand on the door, she lingered. "Have you heard, ma'am, from Miss Gracie again? The house is not like the same without her. I shall be glad enough for one when she comes back to it; and it does not seem to me she is over happy. Master Bobbie showed me her last pretty note to him, and it all was, 'Home is home, and there's no place like it.'"

"Yes, Charity, Miss Grace is finding that out; but you know she chose this visit; it was of her own free will she went; and, as we know she is well and making progress with her studies, we cannot shorten the time originally proposed. It is a long and expensive journey, and, as she is at Rockton, she must, we think, stay there till Christmas."

Charity closed the door, and Mrs Buxton took out Grace's last letter, and read it for the third time. It was not expressed so plainly as those she wrote to Bobbie, but there was in it an undertone of yearning and longing for home, to which Mrs Buxton responded with an intense desire to recall the absent one. Never before had a child been away from her for any length of time, and she felt the separation keenly. There was also something especially winning in Grace. With all her little weaknesses and failings, she was truly a loveable girl, and the flower of the home garden, where she had been so wisely and yet tenderly nurtured.

Mrs Buxton's meditations were interrupted by Bobbie—his satchel over his shoulder: he came in to say "Good-bye" as usual before starting for school.

"Have you mastered the Greek lesson yet, dear?" his mother asked.

"Yes," he said, listlessly. "I have been writing to Gracie, mother; have you anything to enclose?"

"No; but, my dear boy, is that the envelope?" Bobbie laughed.

"Yes, the Rockton postman will be edified,


I hope, by my Pegasus; and I only wish that I were really on his back, flying off to Rockton, or anywhere away from Lewinsea, mother; I hate the Grammar School."

Mrs Buxton was looking at the envelope. It was an illustrated address, on which was seen Pegasus, with a mythical-looking individual on his back, holding in her hand a scroll, on which was written, "Miss Grace Buxton, Alexandria Square, Rockton."

"Always drawing, Bobbie," his mother said, "I wonder you don't express yourself within by pictures."

"No; I have too much to say to Grace. Do you know, I don't think Grace is very happy at Rockton; can't she come home?"

"Not yet, dear; as far as we can judge, she is well, and in the fair way of improving herself; and perhaps, Bobbie, she is learning a lesson she never would have learned at home—a lesson we are all so slow at learning,—that outward things do not constitute our happiness. Health and youth and activity are indeed God's best gifts; but we may be happy without these, as I have proved. Still more may we, having these, be happy and contented and joyful, though a



cherished desire is not granted—though we have less of luxury or the good things of this life than some around us may have.”

“It’s not that sort of thing I care for, mother, one bit,” said the boy, vehemently; “but I hate the drudgery of school, and grinding for ever at the same things which will never do me any good. Enough Latin and Greek to read the grand old poets is all I want; but, mother, why should I be put down and rated, because I get hopelessly astray in algebra, and am beaten hollow in propositions even in decimals and fractions, by the hard-headed fellows about here, who, nevertheless, are”——

“Poor Bobbie!” his mother said; but she drew his face down close to hers, and whispered, “We must learn to do what we do not like, Bobbie—well and cheerfully—because the path of duty is always safe, and so is the station of life into which God is pleased to call us.”

Bobbie sighed, kissed his mother, shouldered his satchel, and went off to school.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROCKTON HOUSE.

THE glowing sunshine of a lovely July day lay upon the squares and terraces of Rockton, and the Venetian blinds were drawn down in Alexandria Square, flapping gently against the window-panes, as the light summer wind came wandering through them, and stirred the papers on the table before Grace Buxton.

The morning-room beneath the drawing-room had been given up to Grace for her lessons. Here Madame Forgeur initiated her in the nice points of French pronunciation; and, clasping her hands and shrugging her little shoulders, had declared that Grace was "*bonne—très bonne*," and would soon get rid of that terrible hard "n" at the final of *bien* and *mon* and *ton*, and would learn to think French was "*la plus belle langue du monde*, so different to that heavy, difficult German." Here, too, in this pleasant sitting-

room, Grace had music lessons from a first-rate master, a little cottage piano having been hired for the purpose. Here she had drawing lessons from a sober, gray-haired artist, who understood perfectly the mixing of colours and the rules of perspective; but who had no eye for the beautiful, as Bobbie had, and knew nothing of the visions and creations which came spontaneously from his pencil. These lessons and preparations for them took up some hours of each day; and then there was a calisthenic and dancing class, to which Grace was attended once a week by Mrs Moore. Grace found this the great event in her life at Rockton; the very sight of other children and girls of her own age was charming; but she was too shy to make any advances to them, and they, considering Lady Melstone's niece a very important person, made no overtures to her. How lonely Grace felt, I have no words to tell; nor how the daily routine of life without companions was becoming oppressive in the extreme! Her aunt had a great many visitors, for the knocker on the large oak-panelled door was vibrating from three to five; but Grace was in her study, and seldom saw any one who came. Sometimes she drove with her

aunt over the Downs, and would look with envious eyes at groups of children and nurses—at happy laughing pairs of sisters—at boys of Bobbie's age,—till she felt ready to spring out of that grand carriage, and have a scamper over the uneven turf, or down one of the green slopes. Sometimes when her aunt was not well enough to drive, Grace had a walk with Moore; but she was no companion for her, and conversation flagged.

So the days went on—lesson and luncheon and dinner, and then an evening with her aunt, when she was required to read aloud, to play chess, or make herself generally agreeable. Indeed, Lady Melstone liked Grace very much; she was decidedly ornamental, and very sweet-tempered and clever.

"My dear," she said one evening, "that dreadful photograph you sent me must be replaced. I must have you taken here, now you have lost that old-world look of yours, and we will send your likeness to Lewinsmoor, shall we?"

"Or I can take it when I go home, Aunt Grace," Grace had ventured to say.

"Go home? Oh, you must make yourself at home here!" was the sharp reply. "They can't

want you ; they have too many as it is. Now, then, finish that paper in the new magazine you began last evening. You read uncommonly well for your age."

Grace felt a sudden pang when her aunt spoke. "Home ! Yes, she certainly must go home. Rockton could never be home." The very thought of it gave her a choking in her throat, and that any uncertainty should hang over her return sent her to bed with a weight at her heart.

It was the following morning when, as we have said, Grace sat by the table, with her lessons before her, the sunshine glancing in through the blinds, and the call of the vegetable women and click of the area gate the only sounds without. It was far too hot for walking in the middle of the day ; all the little children had toddled home for their noonday sleep, and the rumble of the Bath chairs on the pavement had ceased till the heat of the sun should have decreased. Occasionally a doctor's carriage rolled swiftly past, or a railway delivery cart thundered through the Square, stopping with a jerk at some house farther down : but for the most part there was comparative stillness ; for the long continu-

ance of heat had lulled the energies of the most active.

At last a carriage stopped before the house. Grace knew whose it was at that hour ; the little short decided rap was the doctor's who came regularly three times a week to see Lady Melstone, who was never very well, and thought herself much worse than she really was. Lately, however, she had had a sort of feverish attack, which had reduced her a good deal at her advanced age, and for which Dr Carrington found it necessary to prescribe in good earnest. Grace had once or twice happened to pass Dr Carrington in the hall ; but as his visit was usually made before her aunt left her own room of a morning, she had never spoken to him. Great was her surprise to-day, therefore, when, after a short parley with the servant in the hall, she heard her name, as Watson opened the door,—

“Miss Buxton ! Dr Carrington wishes to see you.”

The next moment the doctor had advanced to the table where Grace sat, and held out his hand. Her blushes of surprise, and her shy, tremulous reply to his greeting did not escape him.

“I am come to prescribe for you,” he said,

fixing upon her a pair of earnest, searching eyes, which looked out from beneath a wide intellectual forehead.

"Thank you. I am quite well," said Grace. "I am always well."

"Ah!" said Dr Carrington, a smile rippling over his face. "I rather doubt it. However that may be, I want to carry you off to-day, for I have two little girls at home most anxious to see you; so shut up all those books, and run up-stairs and get ready, while I pay Lady Melstone my visit."

Grace looked steadily at the doctor now, as he stood, hat in hand, waiting for her to obey him. Like the rest of the world, she never thought of disputing his will. At the height of one of the finest provincial practices as a physician in England, Dr Carrington was universally believed in and obeyed.

"I think, please," Grace said, as she gathered up her papers, "I must ask my aunt's leave first. But I am afraid, thank you, I cannot come, for this is the afternoon when Mr Turner comes to give me a music lesson." And a cloud passing over Grace's face showed how disappointed she was.

Dr Carrington considered a moment.

"It strikes me Mr Turner gives my children a lesson this afternoon also ; to-day is Thursday, is it not ? If so, it is easily managed ; roll up your music, and we will make it all right. Ah, what is this ?" and the doctor's eye fell on a pen-and-ink sketch of Bobbie's which was lying on the table under an exercise book which Grace had moved.

"It is my brother's doing," said Grace. "He is so fond of drawing."

"He is a genius," Dr Carrington said quickly ; "how old is he ?"

"My age," said Grace, "that is fifteen ; we are twins."

"And have you the drawing talent too ?" asked the doctor.

"No ; oh no, not like that ; mine is only copying what I see ; Bobbie's is drawing what he thinks."

"A nice distinction, little lady," he said, laying his hand on Grace's shoulder. "Come, we shall be friends, I think ; you shall see plenty of pictures presently. Now we must make haste."

Grace flew up before the doctor, and met Mrs Moore at the head of the stairs. Lady Melstone

had heard the well-known rap, and was getting fidgetty and cross that Dr Carrington did not appear.

"Moore, Moore! I am to go home with Dr Carrington; will you please ask my aunt if I may?"

"I will settle that," said the doctor, who was now close by, and heard the whispered question; "only be quick, little lady."

Grace went to her room, and was soon followed there by Moore. Miss Buxton was to go, but she was to change her dress, and put on one which Lady Melstone desired. As Grace was nearly ready, this was very trying; but Moore speedily accomplished the change, and in a few minutes more, Grace was seated in the doctor's green carriage, and driving off with him to Rockton House.

Grace was rapturously received on her arrival by two merry girls of twelve and thirteen, who came skipping down a long hall to meet her. They led her off in triumph to their mother, who was seated at the farther end of a drawing-room, very unlike in all its points to the Rockton drawing-rooms in general and of Lady Melstone's in particular. The windows were of an old-

fashioned shape, and set in deep recesses with thick frames, looking out over a wide-sloping lawn to the cathedral tower of Stokesbridge, and the distant country beyond.

"How many beautiful pictures!" was Grace's first thought as she followed Nora and Lily Carrington up the room; and, "Oh that Bobbie were here!" was the second.

Such a bright happy day she passed! Mrs Carrington was so kind, and so like a mother, and Nora and Lily were so bright and merry, that Grace's spirits rose; and when the doctor saw her in the evening at tea he scarcely knew her for the same subdued child he had found at Alexandria Square in the morning. As Dr Carrington was seated in his own peculiar chair, with Lily perched on one of the arms and Nora on a stool at his feet, while Mrs Carrington made the tea, Grace felt a home feeling creep over her, to which she had been a stranger for three long months.

"Now, then, madcaps," said the doctor, "tell me what you have done with your little guest to-day. I hope they have not quite overpowered you," he added, laying his hand kindly on Grace's arm, as she sat near him.

"Why, papa, she has heaps and heaps of brothers and sisters at home," said Nora.

"No ; heaps of sisters," Lily corrected ; "but only one brother."

"Yes," said Grace, "it has been so nice to-day, I have felt as if I were with them all again at Moor End. We went such a beautiful walk over the Downs. I never knew before what the Downs were : I have only driven over them with my aunt across the straight roads, or taken a stiff turn with Moore up to the turnpike and back again. It is so kind of you to have me here."

"My dear child, I wish I had thought of it sooner," was the reply ; "and it was, at last, Mrs Carrington's thought, not mine ; but I suppose we shall have plenty of time to cultivate our acquaintance."

"Oh, I don't know," said Grace. "I am going home at Christmas—perhaps before. Has my aunt said anything to you about me?"

"A great deal to-day," was the reply ; "all very flattering. You seem to have filled the vacant niche in the old lady's heart. You will have some trouble to get away, I expect, at Christmas, or, indeed, at all."

"Oh, Dr Carrington!" Grace exclaimed, "I must go home; my aunt is very kind to me, but I want so to see them all again; you can't think how much! I was so often inclined, when I was at home, to wish for a change, and many things we cannot have there, and now—now"——

The trembling voice warned Grace to stop, for she was on the very brink of tears, and Dr Carrington kindly said,—

"Well, my child, you will go home no doubt when the right time comes; meantime, you must come and see us very often."

"She plays very well, papa," Lily said; "Mr Turner gave her her lesson here you know; but her brother draws so beautifully!"

"Ah! that is Bobbie, is it? Well, I am so fond of drawing myself, I shall like to hear about him."

Grace was only too glad to talk of her brother; and she kindled quite an interest in her hearers about him.

And so they sat talking and listening till the summer twilight faded, and the lights of Stokesbridge shone bright and clear beneath the windows, whilst within, the lamp shed a soft

radiance. Presently Dr Carrington fetched a portfolio of choice engravings, which he explained to Grace, as she looked at them with delighted eyes. When all had been gone through, Grace said, "May I see the second one again, please?" and the doctor turned back to an engraving with the single word "Geduld" beneath it.

It was not like Bobbie's angel at all; it was the figure of a homely gentle woman in an everyday dress, engaged in some household employment, and looking up with a calm serene smile at a rough ill-conditioned man, who was stretched out in a chair by the fire, and who by a sudden kick of his foot had evidently just overturned a table, upsetting a basket of work and materials, which were lying on the floor, and waking by the noise, a child, who was sitting up, with a frightened expression, in its little bed, and evidently preparing for a roar.

"The print is a German one," the doctor said, "and is of far less value than many I possess; but it was given me by a dear friend when I was married long ago. Mrs Carrington always said it was intended for her. In the letter this friend wrote to me, she said, 'I wish you a

beautiful life, and that which more than anything else helps to make life beautiful, *Patience*.' Well, though now I daresay you think, my child, I have everything I desire, the time has been when Mrs Carrington and I needed patience in no common degree. Did we not?" he said, turning to his wife.

"Indeed we did," she responded, coming to look at the old favourite with loving eyes. "But, Sandford, it was you who took the lead in patience then, as in all other things now."

The doctor's answering look of perfect sympathy and love was very pleasant. Then Mrs Carrington said to Grace,—

"Your mother is an invalid, my dear?"

"Yes; she never gets off the sofa;" and Grace's eyes filled as she added, "She makes her own life and ours beautiful by patience, I am sure."

Then she went on to tell of Bobbie's translation of the pretty German poem, and the pictures he drew round it in his exercise book.

"Let us hear his verses," Dr Carrington said.

"Oh, do! oh, do!" Nora and Lily entreated; "we have only just begun German, but we like it a hundred times better than French."

Grace yielded with a blushing cheek, and
repeated, in a voice tremulous from shyness,
Bobbie's rendering of

GEDULD

" There goes an Angel gliding
Soft through this earthly land,
For earthly need providing
A solace from God's hand.

" Peace is in all his glances
Sweet guardianship from ill :
Oh, follow through all chances
The Angel Patience still !

" Through earthly pain right truly
He brings you on the way,
Discoursing ever newly
About the brighter day.

" Take courage, he is near you
When you would quite despair,
To lift your cross and cheer you,
And charm away your care.

" To gentle grief he'll soften
The spirit's bitterest smart;
In meekness merge full often
The surging of the heart.

" He brightens every hour,
Heals every sore disease,

With the gentleness of power,
By slow and sure degrees.

“He will not chide your grieving
When he would dry your eyes,
Nor blame your breast for heaving
In chastening its sighs.

“And when the storm is raging,
And you are murmuring, ‘Why?’
With smile of sweet presaging
He points you to the sky—

“Waits with a full assurance
On each inquiring fear:
His watchword is, ‘Endurance—
The resting-place is near.’”

“Well,” said Dr Carrington, “I think Bobbie is a brother to be proud of; but don’t encourage him, little maiden, at fifteen, to lead a too imaginative life. Hard work—yes, and work that he does not like, too—will be good discipline for him. I know what this rough work-a-day world is; there is no tonic to brace us to meet it better than work—setting one’s shoulder to the wheel; and with determination too.”

“That is just what mamma says, but it is rather hard for Bobbie sometimes; when I go home again I shall tell him what you say.”

A Bath chair, attended by a servant, was now announced for Miss Buxton, and Grace rumbled over the pavement in it to Alexandria Square. Her happy day at Rockton House was over.


CHAPTER IX.

NEW FRIENDS.

FROM the day of Grace Buxton's first visit to Rockton House, a new element seemed to be infused into her life at Alexandria Square. The letters she wrote home were more bright and cheerful, and whole chronicles were written to Bobbie about the Carringtons.

But all this time Lady Melstone was getting more rather than less ill, and was very feeble and fractious. She became exacting to Grace, and liked to have her constantly with her. Amongst her numerous acquaintances at Rockton she had few friends; and though the heavy knocker was continually resounding through the house, while Watson brought up cards of inquiry, these were from people whom his mistress did not choose to admit into her sick-room, and who were, truth to tell, not very anxious to come there.

In the beginning of August, Dr Carrington



unexpectedly left Rockton with his family for two or three months, breaking away, for the first time for many years, to seek the change and variety he so greatly needed. This was a sad blank to Grace, for though her aunt frequently insisted on her refusing invitations to the doctor's house, she had the pleasure of seeing him every day; and the sound of his horses' swift feet trotting up to the door gave her heart a thrill of pleasure. He had always a kind word to say to her. Often he brought her a book, or would lend her some choice etching to copy. And he frequently would ask, "Well, what news of Bobbie?" and the very question was at once a way to Grace's heart. When he was gone, and a stiff, formal gentleman took his place in attendance on her aunt, Grace felt the change. Besides, day by day, the hours when she was required to sit with her aunt grew longer, and preparation for her lessons was really difficult.


"I think I must give up my music lessons, Aunt Grace," she said one day. "I have not time to practise properly; and it seems a pity to go on with them."

"Not time? What nonsense!" was the reply. "But give them up by all means, if you please."

So they were given up accordingly, and the drawing lessons also in a short time were suspended too. French lessons were continued, because Grace could learn by them to read French better aloud to her aunt; and sometimes she required that amongst other things.

Feeble and ill as she was, Lady Melstone was dressed every evening, and expected Grace to be dressed too. Grace had white muslin frocks and blue sashes now, and a great variety of other dresses also. Her aunt liked to have various articles of attire from the Rockton and Stokesbridge shops, and amuse herself by turning them over and choosing something for Grace. Sometimes Grace would find it difficult to believe that she could ever have cherished a longing for these things. Now she would often go to her room and look lovingly at the contents of the lowest drawer in the wardrobe, where Moore had laid neatly away her home frocks, the wide brown hat, and the plaid shawl.

One wet afternoon she had been looking at the old-fashioned blue muslin with Ruth's bit of lace on the neck, and crying over it with a passionate yearning for home, when a tap at her



door was followed by Moore's coming in. She had a card on a tray, and giving it to Grace, she said, —

"The Dean wishes to see you, Miss Buxton."

Grace read the name on the card with great astonishment, "The Dean of Stokesbridge."

"Surely he cannot have asked for me, Moore?"

"Yes, Miss Buxton, Watson says he did. Watson," she added, "never makes a mistake."

Grace gave a glance at her red eyes in the glass, hastily smoothed her hair, and went down to the drawing-room. At the door she paused, her heart beat, and she felt frightened at the idea of standing face to face with a Dean, and having a *tête-à-tête* with him. But the moment the plunge was made, and Grace was actually in the room, fear vanished. All the reverence of her nature was awakened by the face and figure of the Dean as he advanced to meet her with outstretched hand. The silvery white hair gave him the appearance of greater age than he had actually attained, and the beauty of the clear cut features was in reality heightened by it. Such a face! such a dignified yet gentle bearing! little Grace was amazed.

"My dear," he said, "my nephew, Dr Carrington bid me not forget on my return to Stokesbridge to call upon you ; and I am very glad to do so. How is Lady Melstone to-day ?"

Grace replied ; and then followed more questions and pleasant conversation, the Dean telling her that he had seen the Carringtons at Geneva, when he and Mrs Sandford were on their way to England, as Dr and Mrs Carrington were on their way to Italy. The doctor was looking already much refreshed, and the Dean hoped he would return strengthened for his heavy winter's work at Rockton.

"So you are a little lonely here ?" he continued.

"Yes—that is," said Grace, "my aunt is extremely kind to me, and only gives me too many things ; but I am longing to go home. Papa does not think I must do so till Christmas. It is a long and expensive journey, he says, and he wishes me to get all the benefit I can from the lessons Lady Melstone has been so good as to give me. Since she has been so much more poorly, however, I have had to give up music and drawing."

"Ah, perhaps you are sent here to learn graver lessons, my child, than those. Is it so ?"

for he saw Grace's lips quivering, and she spoke with earnestness.

"I don't know," was the low answer.

"You have many brothers and sisters at home, I think," continued the Dean. "It must be a change from life and activity to come here. Was it your parents' wish—I mean, did they propose it to you?"

"No; oh, no! It was my own great desire, from the moment my aunt said something about it in a letter. I was so eager to come—I thought it would be delightful; but it only makes me love home ten thousand times better."

"Ah," the Dean said, "I think I understand. Well, since it was your own choice, you must try to get all possible good from it. You know what kind of good I mean—something more than a nice pronunciation of French and a fine touch in music; you must try to tune your soul for higher melodies, and mount upward and press onward."

"I will try," was the faint answer; "but I have not been getting on in that way since I came here. I miss papa's talk with us, and his sermons, and I miss mamma. You know she has

to lie on the sofa, but she is always reminding us of our duty, and of all that I am especially so apt to forget."

"Are you confirmed?" the dean asked.

"No; I am to be confirmed next spring, with Bobbie, my twin brother. Do you know my aunt?"

"Oh, yes! very well."

"Then would you ask her to let me go to the cathedral at Stokesbridge sometimes in the week when I go out with Moore? she does not like it, I think, and I do *so* like it, but I cannot go without her leave."

"Certainly not. But I think she will admit me presently, and then I will slip in a request for you to come and spend Sunday at the Deanery. Mrs Sandford will like to see you. Now, my dear child, from what Dr Carrington told me, and from what I gather from you, I dare say you have need of patience; let it have its perfect work, and try to grow in grace while you are here."

"There is one other thing," Grace faltered out; "my aunt is always speaking now as if I were to *live* here and to belong to her; oh, I am certain papa and mamma will never wish that;

but it makes me afraid that I shall not go home at Christmas."

"Wait patiently till Christmas comes," the Dean said, "and the way will be made plain, I doubt not. May God bless you and keep you, my child."

The blessing was pronounced solemnly ; and the Dean laid his hand upon Grace's sunny hair ; then he followed Moore to Lady Melstone's sitting-room.

"So you have been making complaints of your life here, have you ?" was Lady Melstone's sharp question, as Grace appeared that evening to take up the usual routine of reading and chess, and then draughts for a change, and then reading again. "Oh, don't deny it ; his 'very reverence' has taken up the strain, where his nephew, the doctor, left it. You are a poor little victim, of course ; you led such a pleasant easy life at home—had so many advantages of every kind ; we know that, don't we, Velvet ?"

Velvet, who was often addressed thus by her mistress, replied by a little muttered growl, and nestled into the folds of her rich dress again.

"Now, Grace, I happen to like you—you suit

me ; you are quiet and gentle and have a pleasant voice ; you have a good temper too, and you are ladylike and ornamental. Now every one likes a little flattery, so I give you a dose first ; but I do *not* like your complaining of me to his very reverence the Dean, or to his very medical nephew. I don't like it, and I don't intend to put up with it. All that nonsense about wanting to go to church oftener, and longing to get home, where you have scarcely butter to your bread, won't go down with me ! The Dean is so condescending as to ask you to spend Sunday at the Deanery ; as I suspect you will find one visit enough, I shall give you leave to go ; but, mark me, no more complaints and silly remarks to strangers about your home. Here you are rushing into confidence first with my doctor, next with my parson. It's ridiculous ; let me have no more of it. Now, I am but very poorly this evening ; and old Strangeway's last prescription is worse than useless. Get the chess-table, and let us begin ; and play as if you meant it, child, and don't lose your queen, as you did the other night, or I shall get cross, shan't I, Velvet, darling ?"

And again Velvet responded with a growl.

"Aunt Grace," Grace began, indignantly, "I never"—but, poor child, her voice faltered, and she began to cry, in spite of every effort to prevent it.

"Put out the chessmen directly, and don't be silly," was all Lady Melstone said. "I am very weak, and hate scenes; now, then, where is the red castle? I will give you the first move to comfort you."

"I must speak," Grace said, struggling hard to be calm: "I have only cause to be grateful to you for all you give me, I know—only, I love home, and I can't help longing for it sometimes. I am sure that is all I ever said to either Dr Carrington or the Dean—quite sure."

"That is a bad opening, child; you have put out the wrong pawn. Come, have your wits about you."

It was quite hopeless to make her aunt listen to her, so Grace gave it up. And all that evening, and long after she ought to have been in bed, she sat playing games or reading, the only diversity a few words of endearment to Velvet, or the entrance of Watson, first with two cups of excellent coffee and biscuits, next with fragrant tea and little dainty rolls of bread and butter.

Poor Grace! The square table at home, the piles of books and work, the noise and chatter, the constant requests of the little ones for a needle to be threaded, or a pencil sharpened,—how delightful it all looked in her memory! But the Dean's few and simple words had struck a chord within which had been slumbering since she had left home. Her prayers that night, when at last she was released and went to bed, were more earnest and heartfelt; she asked for patience and grace to learn the lesson which was given her,—the “something higher and better than a better French pronunciation, or a finer touch on the piano,” as her kind friend had expressed it. Thus, full of thoughts of Sunday and her visit to Stokesbridge Deanery, Grace fell asleep.

When Sunday really came, it did not disappoint her expectations; it proved a day of peaceful happiness, which seemed to raise Grace above the little petty vexations and grievances of her daily life.

Indeed, few could be in the society of the Dean of Stokesbridge and his wife without feeling elevated by it. They had no children of their own; one had once been lent them for a


few short years, and was gathered early into the heavenly fold. Thoughts of her lay deep in the mother's heart, and, for her sake, she was especially tender and gentle to all young girls. The September sunshine was lying upon the grass, and intensifying the golden patches on the lime-trees, as Grace crossed the green to the cathedral. The service was quiet and refreshing; and then the sermon! Grace listened to the Dean, because she could not help it, and he seemed to be saying exactly what she needed.

"Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

Had she not been asleep for a long time now—careless in her prayers—careless in daily reading the Bible? She wanted to be amongst those whom the dean described—rousing themselves for the conflict—fighting against sin in the *light* which Christ gives to those who seek it. "He is the Light," and once illuminated by His shining, we should each one of us strive to "let our light shine, that men seeing our good works should glorify our Father in heaven."

As Grace listened, thoughts of that winter evening's walk from church with her father and Ruth, last January, came rising up within her.

She remembered her father's words as they left the Mason's cottage, and she remembered, too, how soon after that evening she became absorbed about her photograph, and her desire that it might make a favourable impression on her aunt, and end in her having an invitation to Rockton. All this Grace recalled, and also how the effort to make her light shine in her own home had grown fainter and fainter almost from that day. She had attained her desire; she was living amongst things that were pretty and attractive, — plenty of books, plenty of pictures, no little clamouring voices to interrupt her at her lessons, no practical Ruth to reproach her for dreaming her time away, or for grumbling at turned frocks and old hats. No; with the single exception of the loss of Bobbie's companionship, Grace had all she had so often longed for; and instead of being satisfied and content, she was looking forward with intense longing to home again; for she was finding out that home, with loving ones who love us, though it implies a life of hourly self-forgetfulness, is infinitely sweeter than absence from that blessed atmosphere, even when surrounded with all the pleasant things which money and rank can give.



CHAPTER X.

COMING SHADOWS.

It was a damp cold evening towards the end of November, when the family were gathered at tea in the parlour at Moor End Cottage.

"Grace is in her glory to-night," Jenny said. "This is the night when she is to go to the party at her dear Carringtons. Fancy Grace in her pretty muslin and pink bows! Won't she be charmed?"

"Won't she look pretty?" said Bobbie, tossing off his hair from his forehead. "Of course, we all wish we were going to the party too, Miss Jenny."

"I don't; so speak for yourself," said Jenny.

But Bobbie shrugged his shoulders significantly, and Mrs Buxton interposed,—

"Grace has written very nice letters lately," she said, "though I think her handwriting is not so clear as it was. Dear child, it will not

be long now, I trust, before we have her safe at home again."

"Well, my dear," Mr Buxton said, "there seems some doubt about that, I think. Your aunt's letter the other day spoke of Grace as her property—not ours any longer—didn't it?"

"Ah, but I am not going to acknowledge that," Mrs Buxton replied, with a smile. "Grace must come home at Christmas. You will take Bobbie to Rockton, and give him the treat, won't you? He really deserves it."

"I think he does," said his father, giving Bobbie a pat on the shoulder, which brought the crimson to his face. "I heard a very good account from Mr Vernon to-day, Bobbie; and in the holidays you and I will try if we can get to Rockton, and see the gallery of pictures at Broom Court, near Stokesbridge, which you know is celebrated, and we will get a peep also at all Dr Carrington's treasures too. Grace must come home, either soon after Christmas or just before. I must have her to prepare for confirmation, and we must begin our classes in January, as the bishop will be at Lewinsea about the third week in March. You and Grace must not be separated then, Bobbie."

"No, father," said Bobbie; and then, to the surprise of every one, he added, firmly, "Grace and I have been trying of late to overcome difficult things, and we shall like to be together at our confirmation. Father," he continued, boldly, "I hope you won't have to complain of me so much in future. I will set my shoulder to the wheel."

Mrs Buxton's eyes shone with delight, and then were suffused with happy tears; but Charity's hasty entrance startled every one.

Charity's eyes were anything but soft in their expression, and her excitement was apparently so great that even her usual flow of language failed her. At last she began,—

"Please to excuse me, sir and ma'am, for coming in so abrupt-like, and you at your tea; but that girl Nelly is driving me out of my senses: she is the first of 'em—and I have had a pretty number, as you know—she is the first that has altogether beaten me. The rhyme and the reason of it all is, that I can't put up with her no more."

Positively and actually Charity's voice failed, and she burst into tears—covering her face with her apron, she sobbed aloud.


"It isn't," she went on presently, "that I have to do more, because she is lazy and idle; it isn't that, but she is so impudent; and as to the truth, well, I do believe she don't know how to speak it."

"Gently, gently, Charity," said Mr Buxton, "that's very hard judgment."

"Well, it sounds so, I don't deny, sir; but here, she has just been and smashed the jug in mistress's room, and has the face to say she didn't, when it is as plain as a pikestaff. She says, sir, she hasn't been into the room, when look here, I have picked up this trumpery bow she will wear at her collar. Who but she would wear such a bit of trumpery finery? And I picked it up amongst the shivers of the earthenware; and she stands there and says"—

"When the children are gone to bed, Charity, you had better send Nelly to me," Mrs Buxton said, "and I will talk to her; if she really persists in falsehood, she cannot remain here."

"Mamma," said Ruth, when the door was closed upon Charity, "I never liked Nelly Thompson; I believe all that Charity says about her. I wish we had taken that nice little Mary Mason."



"I don't think I wish it, Ruth," said her mother. "Mary has been of great use at home since her little sister's illness; and you told me only yesterday that the unpromising Hester Gale was so much improved, and gave you such good answers in her class at school."

"But you will have Mary, if Nelly Thompson has to be dismissed—you will try Mary, mamma?" And Mrs Buxton answered,—

"Yes, I will give her the offer of coming, Ruth, though I am by no means sure that she will accept it."

This very evening was an important one in Grace Buxton's history. She was, as she had told her sister and Bobbie, engaged to go to a party at Dr Carrington's—a juvenile party, where a great many older people would also be gathered. There were to be tableaux and various entertainments; and Grace might reasonably be excused if she looked forward to the evening with delight. Why that delight was not greater might seem strange when one remembers how eagerly she listened to the sounds of music from *Lauristina Villa*, and how often she had longed to participate in such pleasures in days that w

past. But Grace was changed. A certain indescribable something about her struck even Lady Melstone, who surveyed her with a critical eye from head to foot as she stood fresh from Moore's clever hand, ready to go down-stairs to the Bath chair, in which, Rockton fashion, she was to be conveyed to Dr Carrington's.

Lady Melstone was still an invalid; and it seemed unlikely that she would ever be able to go into society again; but she now saw her friends, and sipped a cup of five-o'clock tea with them, and she liked to hear several of them speak of her niece Grace in flattering terms. Whatever belonged to Lady Melstone must be superior to the possessions of any one else, from the particular shape of Velvet's black nose to the water of the diamond she wore in a ring on her finger. Thus Grace must have pretty and becoming dresses, and everything appropriate and in good taste.

To-night she looked very sweet and nice in a white muslin, made by one of the best dress-makers in Rockton. It was simple but perfect in its way; and a white camelia in her hair, and another fastened just where her dress closed at the throat, were her only ornaments.

"Well, child; you will do," was the remark at last, after a keen scrutiny. "Now here is something to finish you," and Lady Melstone took from a black leather case a small chain, with a locket attached to it, which she put round Grace's neck. "There! Now here are a pair of Venetian-shell bracelets. Girls of your age must not wear too many ornaments, or expensive ones; but these are a pretty finish to your kid gloves. Let me look. I hope they are Houbigant's make. Moore, did you notice?"

"Yes, my lady," was Moore's quiet answer.

Many a time had Grace wondered at Moore's quiet answers. She was never apparently ruffled or excited—just the same calm, self-possessed person who had met Grace at the Stokesbridge station months before.

"Are you quite well, Miss Buxton?" Moore inquired, as Grace turned away from her aunt with murmured thanks and the bestowal of as near an approach to a kiss as Lady Melstone ever allowed. "Are you well, Miss Buxton—are you sure you are well?" for Grace, having the question put to her, was very nearly bursting into tears.

"Yes, Moore, thank you," she said at the top

of the stairs. "But I—I can't say any more now," and she went down-stairs to the hall, Moore following.

She was packed into the chair, the glass was put up, and a servant stood ready to attend her to Rockton House. Seen through the glass, Grace's face looked anxious and sad, as the light from the gas-lamp in the hall fell upon it; and as Watson closed the door, he turned to Moore—"That child is not herself, poor young lady! It is enough to mope her, living here, and playing that chess night after night, or rattling the dice for backgammon, and reading and reading book after book, till she has scarcely a breath left in her body. It strikes me the sooner her father and mother come for her the better."

"I am quite of your opinion, Mr Watson; but she has not read much lately. She stopped so often between the sentences, it fidgeted her ladyship. I heard her one night myself, and was surprised at the stumbling manner in which she read, though hers is a sweet voice."

"Sweet—yes; she is sweet as a rosebud. I scarcely ever saw her like, nor shall again, I expect. No, nor you either, Mrs Moore."

Mrs Moore did not contradict Mr Watson, but

returned to her work-room, thinking a great deal about Grace, and feeling sure something was wrong with her. "She is either ill or unhappy," was the final decision; "and I think her mother ought to know."

Meanwhile Grace was mingling with a gay, bright young throng in Dr Carrington's drawing-room. There was everything there to make the evening pass pleasantly. Some excellent historical tableaux, or living pictures, were produced—Margaret of Anjou, with her little son, meeting the robber in the forest, when she was wandering about after the battle which turned the tide of fortune so cruelly against her; the well-known scene of Alfred in the herdsman's tent; the signing of Magna Charta by the treacherous John. All the minute details of the pictures had been got up under Dr Carrington's superintendence, and they were indeed living and life-like pictures. Grace was rather far back amongst the spectators, for many eager little people pressed before her; and she made no effort for herself.

Dr Carrington noticed that her face was very grave and pale, and he heard her say, in answer to a question from some one near her, "Is Margaret's tunic green or blue?" "I don't

know." The speaker was an elderly lady, and she replied—

"Don't know! Why I should have thought your eyes were sharp enough to tell that. I am short-sighted."

Dr Carrington heard this remark, and noticed an expression of distress which passed over Grace's face. His keen, searching glance was followed by a gentle hand laid on her shoulder. The movement made her look up into his kind face—a wistful, questioning glance it was—and the words, "Poor child," escaped from the doctor's lips, in spite of himself. Grace put her hand into his, and said with touching simplicity—

"Oh, I do really think I am going blind."

Then followed a hardly restrained sob, and the next moment Mrs Carrington missed her husband, and heard Lily say—

"I saw papa go through that door to his study with some one, mamma. I think it was Grace Buxton."

Yes, it was Grace Buxton—seated in a chair in the doctor's little study, where many a tale of woe had been breathed out, and many a sore heart had felt relieved by merely making a full confession of bodily pain or distress to such a

listener. The doctor now stood with one arm on the chimney-piece gazing down on Grace with infinite pity as he heard her story. She did not cry now; her face was very white, but she spoke calmly.

"I have felt it coming on for some time," she said. "If I had been at home I should have told them all about it, and of a pain I had at the back of my left eye especially; but I did not wish to make them unhappy or uneasy; and I knew they wished me to stay here till Christmas. It is only during the last three weeks it has been so very bad. But I gave up my drawing and music lessons the more readily because I had such a black mist before me, particularly when I tried to draw. Then I have had great trouble to keep up reading to my aunt lately; and last night—last night I moved her queen in chess twice instead of my own, and she got vexed, and said my mind was wandering, and then told me to put the pieces into the box."

"Why did you not tell me, my child?" the doctor asked, "or your friends at the Deanery? Surely you were certain of sympathy there."

"I did mean to tell Mrs Sandford next Sunday, and ask her what I had better do; but,

somehow, it was terrible to me to put it into words. Oh, to be blind, and never see the beautiful things I love again—mamma's face, nor Bobbie's: what will Bobbie say"——

She was breaking down now, when Dr Carrington stopped her,—

"My child, I will examine your eyes more minutely to-morrow, and if it is as I fear and as you fear, I will myself take you to the first oculist here, and to the first in London also. You must not lose heart," he continued; "I cannot believe but that you will see again as well as ever."

"Thank you; oh, so much!" she said, "I will try to be brave; but I am frightened when I think of it all. I shall be able to keep in memory many lovely things," she added. "I must hope, and I must pray, for patience now more than ever; I think God will give me patience. He has seemed near me during these last dreadful weeks, when every day I have been certain I could see less and less distinctly."

"Dear child, dear child!" was Dr Carrington's only reply; but he bent down and kissed the pale forehead, and then he asked her if she would like to go back to the drawing-room?

"No," Grace thought, "she had rather stay there." So he stirred the fire and made her comfortable, and then returned to his guests with his face so grave and preoccupied that several people said to themselves, "The doctor has been called out to some bad case."

Soon he contrived to let Mrs Carrington know where Grace was, and she kindly went to her, taking an ice with her. Mrs Carrington was very tender and gentle, but Grace could not say much. She sat quietly in her corner by the doctor's study fire after Mrs Carrington had returned to her guests, thinking over all that lay before her. Poor child! the sound of music and the echo of happy voices fell on her ear, and she felt apart from it all—alone and sad.

But patience was indeed to "have her perfect work" in Grace's soul. The struggle had been long going on within—the hidden struggle against self and self-pleasing; now the prayer of her heart was, "Be Thou my light, and help me to make my light shine: even though it should be Thy holy will that I should be blind—quite blind, till I see Thee as Thou art—see *the King in His beauty.*"

CHAPTER XL

PAIN AND PLEASURE.

A STRANGE feeling of uncertainty and a difficulty of realising her own position came over Grace as she sat waiting the next day for Dr Carrington, who was consulting with Mr Crichton, the oculist, in another room, after an examination of her eyes.

At last she heard the door open, and her kind friend came in. He looked so grave and sad that Grace could not doubt that he brought her no good news. She tried hard to be calm, and went up to the doctor:—

“Please tell me *exactly* what Mr Crichton says.”

“My dear child, the case is a difficult one. I have nothing very definite to tell you yet; but Mr Crichton does not wish his opinion alone to be taken, so we will go to the fountain-head at once, and we must hear what Mr Markham says.”

"Mr Markham! in London! Oh, I don't think I can go; it would be so expensive. Papa—papa—could not afford it; and perhaps there is nothing to be done. Does Mr Crichton say so? I wish to know. I have felt," she went on, "a black curtain closing in over one eye for some days now, and the other is getting dim. I have the same pain behind that now as I had behind the other."

"And you never said anything of this pain to any one! I cannot understand it—brave little girl!"

"Don't call me that; I am not brave, I am so afraid, sometimes. I did not tell any one because there was no one to tell here, and I did not want to make them unhappy at home. Now they must know."

"Yes, I think I had better write to your father to-day; and you, my child, will you write?"

"Oh yes! and then I must go home when it is settled about my eyes. You will tell Aunt Grace I must go home; I *must* go, for fear it should get *quite* dark, that I may learn their faces well, so that I shall never forget them."

She covered her face for a moment with her

hands, and the doctor did not speak—this patient pathetic gentleness in meeting her trial was so much more touching than any loud lamentation or rebellious grief would have been to him.

All that day and all the next the rain fell in torrents, and Grace sat with her aunt and had to listen to the often-repeated assurance that “she did not believe a word of it, and that Grace was not blind. It was absurd and ridiculous to say so, with such eyes as those, so like what her own had been when she was young! Grace was nervous and fanciful.” And then Velvet was appealed to; and Grace being ordered to do nothing, could only sit and endure; taking refuge in her own room for a few minutes sometimes, and listening to the dull splash of the rain against the windows, and the eerie sound of the wintry wind rushing up the square, till the aching of her heart was almost more than she could bear. The Dean and Mrs Sandford had been in London for some time, so she had not the comfort of their tender and wise counsel; only a great longing and yearning for home took possession of her, and a sight of home faces before it was too late!

After dinner, on the second day, Grace was seated opposite the chess-board, where she was timidly arranging the pieces, and conscious that it was more by instinct than anything else that she put them in their right places, when Watson opened the drawing-room door, and announced—"Mr Buxton!"

Up sprang poor Grace; down went the chess-table, with all its costly array of ivory pieces, as her dress caught the corner. Velvet growled and barked and muttered. Lady Melstone sharply inquired if the child were mad; while Grace was only conscious of being folded in the strong arms of her father, and, burying her face in his shoulder, felt as if the worst was over.

"Grace, Grace, how is this, my child? why did you not tell us before?"

"I couldn't," she whispered: "I felt as if I dare not; but don't be unhappy, papa,"—as Mr Buxton looked down anxiously into her face.

Yes, to the keen glance of love there was no doubt a change in those soft purple-gray eyes—an unseeing look, so hard to describe, so easy to see.

"Well, Mr Buxton, so you are come to see

if all this nonsense about the child's eyes is true?—Oh, I am quite an invalid!" in answer to his inquiries, "quite an invalid—equal to no exertion; am I, Velvet? But about the child—about Grace; is she not grown and improved? I flatter myself they would hardly know her at Moor End now."

"Yes, she is very much grown," said Mr Buxton, sadly, as he looked at his young daughter in her pretty white dress with crimson spots, so unlike the sober Jenny Wren colours which his fledglings wore in the home nest. "Grown and altered too! This is a very unexpected trial about her eyes."

"Oh yes; but we won't talk of that; it is, I hope, greatly exaggerated. You will see Dr Carrington to-morrow, and hear what he says. You must take quite a third away from his gloomy opinion, you know. It suits him to say I ought to have found this out sooner, that Grace has read to me too much, and so on. If it were not Dr Carrington, I should be very much offended with him; but he is a person I can't very well quarrel with, because he is the only medical man who understands my constitution; *isn't* he, Velvet? Now they will show you

your room, and then we will have a pleasant evening. How are the dozen you have left at home? And how is poor Ruth?—your wife, I mean.”

Mr Buxton answered that Mrs Buxton was pretty well, though quite confined to her sofa. She was now living on the thoughts of Grace's return.

“Return! what do you mean?”

“I mean,” said Mr Buxton, firmly, “that I think Grace has trespassed already too long on your kindness, and that I hope to take her home the day after to-morrow.”

“You will do no such thing. I can't spare the child. If she is half-blind, better here than at home, with your small means and crowded house; but we will discuss that hereafter. Watson, show Mr Buxton to his room.”

Mr Buxton gave Grace's hand a little reassuring squeeze before he left the room, and the subject of whether or not she should return with her father to Lewinsmoor was not again discussed that evening.

The next morning Dr Carrington came early, and Mr Buxton had an interview with him and the oculist, Mr Crichton. Both admitted that

the case was a little out of the ordinary course, and that it would be most satisfactory to have Mr Markham's opinion. Mr Buxton sighed.

"I fear," he said, "that it is out of my power to take Grace to him. I have heard that Mr Markham's fees, even for consultation, are very large, and that no operation can be performed by him under one hundred guineas. I may as well say at once," Mr Buxton continued, "frankly that that sum is a fourth of my income, and Grace is one of eight children."

"I think—I fear," Mr Crichton interposed, "that no operation can be possible. The disease is in the nerves at the back of the eye ; the pain she now speaks of, poor child, is the symptom of what is coming. It is a very different case to cataract."

"More entirely hopeless?" Mr Buxton asked.

"I greatly fear it is," was the answer.

"My proposition, however," said Dr Carrington, "will, I trust, be agreeable to you. I often run up to town for an afternoon, and return the next morning. I can arrange to do so to-day, see Mr Markham with Grace to-morrow early, and return in time for the greater proportion of my patients here by the express train. As to *our accommodation* in town, that is settled if

you will accede to my plan ;" and Dr Carrington put into Mr Buxton's hand a letter from the Dean of Stokesbridge, offering to receive them all in a house he and Mrs Sandford were occupying in Bryanston Square, which had been lent them for a month by a friend.

The way seemed made plain and clear, and Mr Buxton could no longer hesitate. His eyes filled, and his heart swelled with gratitude, as he read the Dean's letter—such tender loving words about his little Grace, such true sympathy, such hearty offers of help.

So, though Lady Melstone remonstrated and Velvet growled, Grace found herself seated in a railway carriage that afternoon, her father next her, Dr Carrington opposite, and they were puffing away to London.

How strangely mingled is our experience in life—the sweet with the bitter, the rough with the smooth! A year ago what would not Grace have pictured to be the delight of a journey like this to London with her father and a friend like the kind doctor? Even now she was amused and pleased, as only the young can be, by the *present*, and for the time the future looked less *dark*. Then came the novelty of a drive through

the streets of London, past all the gaily lighted shops, and the astonishment at the many sudden stops the cab came to, and the difficulties of getting on in the still crowded thoroughfare; but all the strain of watching and looking had its effect at last. Terrible pain came on behind the "well eye," as Grace called it, and by the time they reached Bryanston Square she was scarcely able to lift up her head, and was only too thankful, after drinking a cup of tea, to go to bed, where Mrs Sandford came to see her.

There, with her face hidden in the pillow, her hand in the sweet and gentle old lady's, Grace poured out her troubles. Not that she was hopeless about her eyes; she had not really grasped as yet the idea of total blindness, but she seemed to dwell on the impossibility of being the help at home she had hoped and planned to be, saying,—

"I don't think I shall ever be able to let my light shine there now, as we talked about that Sunday at the Deanery, after the Dean's sermon."

"And had you then any uneasiness about your eyes, darling? if so, why did you not tell *me*?"

"It was only a little dull aching then, and a dimness like a fog sometimes, which cleared away again, you know. But I thought I would not tell any one—it might be fancy; and then you went away from Stokesbridge just after it had become very bad, and I had made up my mind to tell you and the Dean. Perhaps," she added, catching at the brighter side of the question, "my well eye only aches from sympathy with the other. They are twins, like me and Bobbie; and I am sure he and I always felt the same aches and pains. Ah, poor, poor Bobbie; I shan't be able to help him with his exercises and copy his verses for him as I used to do."

Tender and sympathising words encouraged Grace to tell all her thoughts, and then Mrs Sandford said a psalm for the evening and the collect for the day, and for the first week of the Church's year, kneeling by Grace's side. Both seemed strangely comforting and appropriate; the psalm for the fourth evening brought back to Grace memories of her mother, when she and Bobbie had learned it together by the side of her sofa on Sunday evenings. "*The waters of comfort!*" Surely the Good Shepherd would *lead her there*, and in "*the green pastures*,"

wherein His sheep are fed. Sweet and soothing was the voice which repeated the familiar words, and earnestly did Mrs Sandford's soul go forth to entreat for Grace the needed strength to put on "the armour of light," and gird herself for the conflict as a true soldier of the Cross.

When her father came to bid her "Good-night," half an hour after Mrs Sandford had left her, he found her asleep, a smile upon her lips, the lines of pain smoothed from her forehead, and the long lashes lying upon the flushed cheek. He had fully taken in the grave opinion of Dr Carrington and the Rockton oculist: he scarcely needed to hear the verdict of the greatest eye authority in the kingdom. He saw the trial in its full extent; and yet as he looked on Grace, wrapt in a soft childlike sleep, his smile was a reflection of hers. "God knoweth what is best," he thought; "if it is to be darkness here for her, the light of heaven will be the more radiant; and it may be that in her blindness, she is yet to prove the Light of her earthly home." Then the memory of Bobbie's wretched look came back to Mr Buxton as he had seen it last on the Lewinsea platform, and the smile faded from his face, and he turned away with an anxious and

troubled expression, which like the smile, was repeated, as if by hidden sympathy, on the sleeper's lips. Grace's smile, too, died away; she moved restlessly, and her father heard her murmur,—

“Don't draw any more pictures yet, Bobbie—darling old Bobbie—because papa does not like it; and I—I—can't quite see them, you know—I can't quite see them; I shall see them one day—only not now—not now.”

Dr Carrington took Grace as he would have taken a child of his own to the great oculist's house early the next morning; and such an introduction from one whose fame was farspread, and increasing year by year, perhaps ensured even greater attention and consideration than a large fee would have done; but there was very little new to hear from Mr Markham. No operation availed in cases like these. Strengthening in every way, the best wine and other nourishment, no use of the eyes by reading, writing, or working for six months, and then their condition was to be reported to Mr Markham. A lotion was to be used which was prescribed, and that was all. Not a word was said *of hope* about the eye already nearly sightless; *but* of the other there was hope, if it was com-

pletely at rest, and the general health strengthened.

The three were very silent when they re-entered the cab at Mr Markham's door. A dense and depressing yellow fog brooded over London, and the foot-passengers could scarcely be discerned from the windows. Grace sat with her hand in her father's, her face hidden on his shoulder.

"I don't know how to thank you," she heard her father say to Dr Carrington. "Such an act of friendship as this you have shown me cannot be acknowledged as it should be."

"It has been a great pleasure to me," said Dr Carrington, "to have it in my power to render your child any service. You will take her home, I suppose?"

This roused Grace.

"Yes; oh yes, father—papa—pray take me home! I can be of no use to Aunt Grace now; she will not want me. Pray take me home!"

"Indeed I will, my dear; but we must be careful not to seem ungrateful to Lady Melstone. The Dean and Mrs Sandford have kindly asked us to remain with them another day or two: this will give you a little rest from fatigue and excitement, and we will return to Rockton on

our way home on Friday. You will leave us immediately, I suppose, Dr Carrington ? ”

“ Yes, by the morning express, which I have barely time to catch. I will take care to prepare Lady Melstone and Velvet for your departure, Gracie ; though I think we have all cause to grumble and growl, in true Velvet fashion, that you are so anxious to leave Rockton.”

Grace could only look up and smile at him in reply ; but it was rather a faint, sad smile, and an uncertain, wistful gaze, which made her father’s heart ache. The shadow of coming blindness was certainly fast gathering over those sweet eyes.

The next few days were like a dream. Grace saw with delight how the Dean appreciated and liked her father ; and Mr Buxton told her how refreshing it was to him to have intercourse with a man of such great experience and such keen sympathies.

“ He enters into my cares and anxieties as if he had known me for years,” Mr Buxton wrote to his wife ; “ and thus through Grace’s trial, and the very deep sorrow it is to us, I feel that *I have found one whose advice and counsel is worth having.* Indeed the kindness we

receive, and the true friends our little Grace has gained, does certainly make a silver lining to the heavy cloud. You will find her changed from the child almost to a woman. Tell Bobbie he must keep a brave heart, and meet his sister with a different face to the one with which he departed from me on Wednesday morning."

Mr Buxton and Grace returned to Rockton; and then came parting from Lady Melstone, and a farewell to the life of ease and luxury which Grace had once thought so fascinating. The old lady was touched and softened by Grace's trouble more than she chose to express. But she still obstinately asserted that Grace could not and would not be blind; that she had much better stay where she was, and that she was pleasant as a companion, even though she could do nothing. But, for the present, Grace must go home, and nothing could shake her resolution, or rather repress her longings. Her possessions in the way of dress had so increased that another box had to be provided; a charming box it was, selected by Moore, and filled by her skilful hand. Then to her great surprise, when seated with her mother in the railway, Grace opened an envelope

which Watson had put into her hand as she left No. 5 Alexandria Square. Within was a ten-pound Bank of England note, with an inscription on the fold of the envelope,—

“For turtle-soup, port wine, and all the rest of it : with good wishes, from G. L. R. M.”

“Oh, papa, look !”

“Poor Aunt Grace !” was the reply ; “her heart is in the right place after all, as Charity would say.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE RETURN HOME.

HOME once more ! Once more in the dear old square room, with little voices echoing in her ear, and caressing arms clinging to her as a new-found treasure, Grace Buxton felt a great weight lifted from her heart.

How welcome was Charity's rough embrace ; how delightful the touch of her mother's hand ; the sound of Bobbie's voice ; the chorus of the little ones' joyful exclamations ; the quiet tones of Ruth, remonstrating and keeping order.

Grace had been free from pain in her eyes that day, and in the first excitement of return, the one absorbing topic of the last week at Moor End Cottage seemed held in abeyance. Grace

looked so sweet and pretty they all thought, she was so grown and improved, and it was so charming to have her once more, that beyond one question from her mother of, "How are your eyes to-day, my darling?" the subject of Grace's blindness had not been discussed.

It was not till all the younger children were in bed, and Mr Buxton had retreated to his study to get his sermon ready, and Grace sat by her mother's side, leaning her head against her shoulder, Ruth bending over her work at the table, Bobbie scrawling on a bit of paper, as in old days—not till then, when it was all quiet and hushed within and without, did Grace speak of her trial. Her mother was not prepared for the calmness with which she said at last,—

"I hope I shall not be a great trouble to you all. I will try very hard to be patient. Sometimes it looks all very dark and dreadful; but now I have seen you all again, I think I shall be happier, even if this great curtain, which seems to come before my eyes, should at last shut out the light altogether. Perhaps it won't be quite that; perhaps I may always be able to

see a little, but if not"— Grace stopped, "if not, I think I can say and feel that God knows best."

Mrs Buxton drew Grace close, and Bobbie's pencil went faster and faster, and great tears blotted out his drawing as they fell heavily on the paper, while Ruth, quiet, undemonstrative Ruth, laid down her work and covered her face with her hands.

"There are many things I shall be able to help in, dear mamma; I shall be awkward at first, but I can try, and I shall always have Bobbie to lead me about, and when he is grown up, we can live together, can't we, Bobbie?"

She raised her head from her mother's shoulder to look at Bobbie, but the door had opened and closed. Bobbie was gone.

"Poor, dear boy! I hope he will get used to it in time," she said; "I think he will."

"Yes, darling," her mother whispered, "we must all try to be brave, and help you to be brave, too; at present it is you who are helping us. Who could have thought it of my little Gracie?"

"Ah, mamma, it was so good for me to go to

Rockton. Not in the way I used to fancy it would be; but I learned there many things I never could have learned at home; and I don't think I shall ever have foolish longings again for what is beyond my reach. It seems as if," Grace added, reverently, "that in taking away my sight God had hushed all those longings to rest, and given me only one great desire, to let my light, even though it be so tiny and poor, shine at home."

"What good news it is about Bobbie, mamma," she continued, brightly; "papa told me Mr Vernon said he expected he would take a good place at the Christmas examinations; and, mamma, he is to go to Rockton, and stay with Dr Carrington and see all his beautiful pictures, and draw and paint as much as he likes; isn't that delightful? I wish you could see Dr Carrington, mamma; perhaps he would do you good. I don't think there can be another doctor in the world like him; he seems to look into you, and read all about you, as if you were a book! Then there are the Dean and Mrs Sandford. Oh, I do hope you will know them *some day*; I feel as if I owed the Dean so

much. Mamma, some day you must go to Rockton."

Mrs Buxton shook her head.

"My travelling days are over, dear Grace; but, perhaps, I may see your friends some day, who can tell?"

Through the long winter which followed Grace's return to Lewinsmoor, the wind came sighing over the moor with its old eerie sound, and the days of sunshine were few, for it was a peculiarly dark and gloomy season. The children were much confined at home, and were often tiresome and noisy. Charity grumbled, and Nelly Thompson, after repeated trials, had to be dismissed in disgrace; and all the little minor worries common to every large family, went on day by day, and patience and faith were needed. They were not only needed, but sought for and granted. Though Grace's eyes grew dim—and the one originally affected was all but sightless—though she often felt weak and ailing from the weary neuralgic pains, which scarcely ever left her for a day together, she was the bright influence of the home circle.

"They all seem to love me twice as much since I have been blind," she would say. "How can I help being happy, how could I grumble, when every one is so kind?"

And indeed the gentle girl, who bore the cross appointed her so meekly, excited deep interest in all within her own home, and in many outside it too. The strong attachment which existed between her and her twin brother seemed intensified; and when he was flagging in his school routine, when he was inclined to "dream and draw," as Grace expressed it, a look at the sweet patient face would inspire him to awake, and exert himself to do his father's bidding.

It was a bright March day when the confirmation was held at Lewinsea. Many eyes were on Mr Buxton as he led his little flock up to the communion table; for in that group of youthful figures those of the twin children of the Vicar of Trinity were remarkable. Very quiet and calm Grace looked as she held fast her brother's hand, and walked with timid uncertain steps by his side. There was a deep earnestness in the expression of the sweet face

which told the story of a soldier girding on his armour, and a child resting in a Father's guidance and love. Grace's blue eyes were mostly veiled by their white lids now; but over her countenance a light, and almost a radiance hovered, which had its source from the Fountain of Light itself; the Light in which she should one day see the King in His beauty. Bobbie, in mingled pride and sadness, guided his sister's faltering steps to the right place, and his heart went up in prayer that he might quit him like a man in the battle of life, and be a faithful soldier and servant of the Cross to his life's end.

Mary Mason had also a timid hesitating companion, whose hand she took and drew onwards. Who could have guessed that the neat, tidy girl, with such a serious though tearful face, could be poor Hester Gale? Yet so it was. Mary Mason's labour of love was crowned with success, and Hester had been for the last six months the most satisfactory girl in Ruth's class at the Sunday-school, and had been so well prepared with answers at the confirmation classes, that more than once Mr

Buxton had remarked on it with surprise to his wife.

So the light which is set on a candlestick to be seen of all men, gradually and imperceptibly brightens the darkest place. Mrs Mason and her children were instances of this in their humble position in life, and the Gales had reason to bless the day which had brought them to that cottage on the Moor. Let no one be discouraged by the seeming narrowness of their appointed sphere, or the apparent hopelessness of their efforts for the good of others. If the light is in us, be very sure it will shine ; and so shine that, sooner or later, men shall see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven.

It was the morning after the confirmation, when the postman was again the bearer of a letter for Miss Grace Buxton.

"Such a very big large letter," little Lilly said, as she toddled back from the door.

"Is it really for me?" Grace asked doubtfully of Bobbie, who, glancing at the address, said, "Of course ; and there is 'Deanery, Stokes bridge,' on the envelope."

Several letters separately folded fell from th

envelope as Grace opened it. Bobbie, at her request, read one with her name upon it first.

"Will you give the enclosed to your father?" it said. "It is the offer of a living now vacant, Pensbury, near Rockton; which is in my gift, and which I wish you to have the pleasure of offering him, from me. I know he will care for the souls committed to him; and if God directs him to accept it, I shall feel thankful that I have been able thus to promote the spiritual interests of Pensbury, and smoothe the earthly path of one I so highly value. Your brother will be a scholar at Rockton College; your sisters within reach of masters and instruction; your mother, perhaps, benefited by medical care; and you, my dear child, placed where you can have every attention, and your eyes be treated by so experienced an oculist as Mr Crichton. I put none of these advantages before your father: I know he would not allow them to influence him, if duty seems to point to his remaining at Lewinsmoor; but I pray God to guide him to a right judgment in the answer he may send me."

Mr Buxton took the Dean's letter from

Grace's hand: read it, and the other addressed to himself: and then rising, without a word, kissed his blind child on the forehead, and left the room. For a whole week the decision was unknown; but at last the letter accepting the Dean's proposal was written. The value of the living was very little more than that of Trinity, Lewinsmoor, but the claims of his children asserted themselves and those of their invalid mother, and could not be overlooked. Their advantages at Rockton would be so much greater than at Lewinsmoor, and he felt anything which God permitted to lighten the burden of his wife and gentle patient Grace ought to be accepted with thankfulness.

The curate from one of the Lewinsea churches came up to take Mr Buxton's place at Lewinsmoor, and early in the glorious days of June the Buxtons were settled in their new home at Pensbury. They took with them one pleasant memorial of Lewinsmoor in Mary Mason. Her mother readily gave her up to Charity for a year's training, saying, "Hester Gale would often look in on her and the little ones, and do a kind turn for her if she needed it." And

Hester with a full heart had replied, "Yes, indeed, there's nothing I wouldn't do for you, Mrs Mason."

In their pleasant home at Pensbury, we must leave the Buxtons. The details of their life there would be very much the same as at Moor End Cottage: varied duties and varied trials: but the same help, and the same hope shall be theirs to brighten every step of the way.

In vain Lady Melstone has questioned Velvet as to the reason why Grace—poor little Grace—who is, after all, really going blind, is so happy and cheerful. Velvet can only growl doubtfully when applied to, and his mistress is still unsatisfied. But in her heart arises a half-defined desire to find out the secret of Grace's patience and sweet temper, and of Mrs Buxton's contentment in the midst of a heap of children, who are always fluttering round her sofa like so many moths. "Ruth must really be very strong, and her nerves cannot be sensitive," Lady Melstone decides. But, after all, she feels misgivings that if it is so, the real key to the mystery does not lie there—and, thus, late in the day, when

the evening shadows lengthen and the night draws nigh, a longing faintly asserts itself to have her treasure in heaven and her feet stayed on the Rock which no storm of life or death can shake.

Blessed, thrice blessed, are they, who in the dewy freshness of their youth, give their hearts to God, and strive to follow in the footmarks of Him, who, through all the rugged paths of His daily life—how rugged and how painful no tongue of man or angel can tell—pleased not Himself.

May all who read this story grasp with a firm faith the truth—that no outward circumstances *in themselves* will avail to make us happy. We must have within us the Light which shines down into faithful hearts, from the Sun of righteousness; we must walk in that Light; we must make it shine, so that those around us may see it burning in our patience, our meekness, our charity, and our forbearance.

Then, though the rain may beat vehemently, and the tempest rage around us, we shall be able, through God's great mercy, to feel that our house is builded on the Rock: and what-

ever the storms of this troublesome world may be, one day, one bright and radiant day, He will say to the waves, "Be still"—He will make us glad and give us rest, as He brings us into the haven where we would be.

THE END.



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